

SYNERGY MAGAZINE

EXPLORING THE BOUNDARIES OF CINEMA AND LITERATURE

VOLUME 2: NO.5



HALLOWEEN HORROR

HALLOWEEN HORROR



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VAMPIRE: LUST FOR BLOOD
THE HAMMER HORROR STORY
NO SKIN OFF MY ASS: THE QUEER CINEMA
OF BRUCE LA BRUCE
NUNSPLOTTATION

PLUS

SYNERGY REGULAR DEPARTMENTS
REVIEWS, REVIEWS AND MORE REVIEWS !

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EDITORIAL

I can't believe it is Halloween again so soon !

We have now been producing Synergy as a print and digital edition for two years with nine very successful issues. We have been thrilled with the response we have received from the combination of a free pdf download and a print edition.

Our product schedule has settled at six issues per year and most will be around 150 pages. We have also increased the numbers of feature articles with a record number in our last comedy issue ! Speaking of comedy we were surprised to find the interest in retro comedy and so each issue will now include a comedy section with reviews of new and re-released comedy titles.

This Halloween we have focused on a range of horror themes from the unique horror vision from Clive Barker which covers books, art and film to retro horror.

We have also decided to look at various key images within the horror genre such as The Vampire and the Werewolf and trace these back to the earliest horror films.

Of course there are more recent horror icons and we have decided to look at a couple of them including Pinhead (in our coverage of the Hellraiser series) and Freddy in our feature on Nightmare on Elm Street. With a remake of the original Nightmare on Elm Street on the cards so we thought this would be a timely retrospective.

We also begin our series of Filmmakers in Focus, the first is on Wes Craven and this will be followed by regular profiles of a wide range of filmmakers from all genres and styles.

We think you will find this issue a very interesting read, whatever your pleasure....



THE SYNERGY MAGAZINE

INFORMATION



DVD Regions

Synergy Reviews DVDs from all regions.

The **R** description with each title advises the Region.

1 = USA
2 = UK
3 = Asia
4 = Australia
0 = All region.

NTSC or **PAL** is used with the ALL REGION CODE and refers to the TV format.

DVD-R refers to small DVD-R companies which market rare titles which are out of copyright.

Blu Ray

We only review **All Region** and **Region B** titles.



The best reference site for Blu Ray is [blu-ray.com](http://www.blu-ray.com). It includes lots of details about Blu Ray releases and is one of the only reliable sources for information on which Blu Ray releases are ALL REGION.

Web: <http://www.blu-ray.com>

We review titles from a range of ratings, if a title could be considered “adult” we also include a extra rating of either **M** (Mature) or **E** (Explicit).

While we review the DVD that has been supplied to us (from whatever region), there may be other editions of the film. Since we are a genre based magazine, the range of titles reviewed will always come from all around the globe.

Reviewers

The motley crew of Synergy Magazine includes Robert Black, Bob Estreich, Michelle Taylor, Fiona Johns, Jeremy & Renata Kong as well as occasional freelance reviewers.



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The print edition Synergy Magazine is published 6 times a year and includes all the reviews from the website from the preceding months with extra materials, articles and features extended reviews, added images, screen shorts and special competitions.

As of January 2009 features, articles and competitions **ONLY** appear in the digital and print editions.

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GIVEAWAYS



Youdoodoll

Want to make a doll of your friend, lover or enemy ?

Youdoodoll have great mini-me kits which include a doll, a sticker for making the face and clothes.



Send an email to the Youdoodoll giveaway at promotions@synergy-magazine.com with *Youdoodoll* in the subject line and your name and address in the body of the email.

Would you rather turn your object of attention into a dog , what about a YoudooPET ? You can have your would-be lover following you around like a dog before you know it !



Send an email to the YoudooPET giveaway - promotions@synergy-magazine.com with *Youdoodoll* in the subject line and your name and address in the body of the email.

I KNOW HOW MANY RUNS YOU SCORED LAST SUMMER

"A cricket team are dismissed by a moustachioed serial killer with a razor sharp cricket glove and an arsenal of sharpened stumps.

One by one the killer exacts revenge for the torment he endured 20 years earlier."

I Know How Many Runs you Scored Last Summer is a new cult horror film released by Anchor Bay.

It is the latest in a long tradition of Ozploitation titles and is filled with sex, violence and excess.

It also has a sports theme so will touch the heart of many an Aussie bloke!

We featured *I Know How Many Runs* last issue and it bowled us over!



Send an email to the I Know giveaway - promotions@synergy-magazine.com with *I Know* in the subject line and your name and address in the body of the email.

Subject 2221: The Harbinger Sideshow Collectibles

As The Dead continues to multiply in number and in notoriety, Sideshow continues to investigate new possibilities in the realm of undead reanimation while the DNA-gent struggles to prevent future apocalypse... Be Ready!



The Subject 2221: The Harbinger 12 inch Figure features:

- All new zombie portrait and 'hands'
- Fully articulated male body (Prometheus) with 30+ points of articulation
- Detailed Priest costume including pants, coat, sash, paper collar and cummerbund
- Shoes
- Bible
- Rosary beads
- 12" figure display stand with a print of 'The Dead' logo

Send an email to the Harbinger giveaway - promotions@synergy-magazine.com with *Harbinger* in the subject line and your name and address in the body of the email.

Winners will be notified on October 31st, 2009.

NEWS IN BRIEF



Female special F/X artist ready to direct undead Gorify.com's Teresa Fahs to helm zombie project titled *Haunting Kira*

After ten years helping other genre filmmakers bring monstrosities to the screen, special FX makeup artist Teresa Fahs says she is ready to breathe life into her own undead creations. The CEO of Gorify.com, a one-stop special effects make-up resource for the do-it-yourself zombie, has written and is currently seeking funds for *Haunting Kira*, which she plans to direct in November and release theatrically on Mother's Day next year.

"Over the years, I have become proficient at visually translating a script into reality," Fahs said. "What I haven't had a chance to do, is really push the special effects envelope from the writing and directing perspective."

Now that is changing as Fahs looks to bring fans something different than the normal scare fare they've grown accustomed to with modern horror. The genre has been watered down with remakes, sequels, PG-13 ratings, as well as stale and predictable kills and plot twists. Fahs promises her *Haunting Kira* screenplay stays far away from those pitfalls.

"I've had all these amazing gore bits, scares, and kills floating around in my head for years," Fahs said. "I also had an original zombie concept that goes beyond the typical shooting gallery, and I needed to bring it to the screen. Then one day it all just gelled together. Writing the script was really just the process of yanking it out of my brain."

Fahs describes *Haunting Kira* as a ghost story, a zombie film, a gorefest, and a strange trip that is like *Being John Malkovich* meets *The Shining* meets *Night of the Living Dead*.

"It's got paranormal activity, re-animated and decaying corpses, painfully realistic gore, frenzied and meaningful kills, and an ending that will hopefully make audiences want to see it all again, and again, and again," Fahs said. "'Haunting Kira' also explores issues of death and immortality, the impact of physical pain on

behavior, commentary on medical professionals, how women's self-image is attached to her appearance, the effects of aging on personality, and more. It's not a preachy story though. It's more like a journey into your worst fears with no way out."



Fahs is partially funding the film's budget with revenue earned from Gorify.com. She hopes to find matching funds from investors and is also offering fans a chance to be a part of the production. They can make pledges on Fundable.com and in return for their donations of \$50-\$1,000 they will receive screen and IMDb credits, a DVD copy of the project and progressive perks depending upon the amount pledged.

One of Fahs' most recent credits as a makeup artist was for *The Hillywood Show*, a highly popular online series with more than a million viewers. The creators and directors of the show - the Hindi sisters - have nothing, but praise for the Goddess of Gore.

"Teresa's SFX make-up is by far some of the best work we have ever seen," Hilly Hindi said. Hannah Hindi added, "Her note to perfection and quality is simply amazing. She demonstrates her passion and love for the art in a way that is completely inspiring."

Fahs, who comic book artist Everette Hartsoe (Razor) has called "the female version of Tom Savini," started as a figure sculptor a decade ago. From that she quickly moved into prop fabrication, which led to her current field of designing prosthetics and doing special effects makeup. Aside from *The Hillywood Show* and horror films (*The Last Sin*), her work can also

be seen in cop dramas (*Dirty Martini*), war movies (*Survivor Stories*) and sci-fi cinema (*Extinct*).

"Making this film is the natural evolution of my career, and it's sorely overdue," Fahs said. "The cure for the staleness in horror is diversity. Originality in new horror won't come from killing people new ways, it will come from dynamic characters and great plots."

Women have a unique perspective in horror, and I happen to know there are a ton of hungry hardcore female fans. No one knows pain better than a woman. No one knows blood better than a woman."

Fans can haunt Kira on Myspace:
<http://www.myspace.com/HauntingKira>

12 Bells

12 Bells is a film about a diverse group of apartment dwellers who unsuspectingly become trapped in a parallel dimension of disparate doors. While most are merely acquaintances at the outset, the group is thrust into a maze of hallways and rooms only to be separated by the mystifying element of each doorway. As they struggle to reunite and find their way, they encounter a myriad of macabre and often manic beings who threaten their life with false hope and violent sadistic behavior.

Erik Soulliard's *12 Bells* is a suspenseful, high-paced horror that highlights the supernatural possibility that not every missing person is a victim of violent crime. Set in a warehouse resembling a mysterious netherworld, the clash of human and sub-human beings results in a chilling perplexity of survival.

Currently embarking on a fundraising campaign for the production and seeking to commence filming in the fall of 2009, the team at Annubis Productions includes exceptional local produc-

tion personnel and well known talent to be brought to Lebanon, PA to shoot a film that will premiere at top-tier film festivals and eventually enjoy international theatrical release. The film, with a current budget of \$1.2 million, will be shot with the latest red camera equipment which is equal to 35mm and easily converts to HD allowing for theatrical release.



Erik Soulliard writer, director and actor of *12 Bells* wrote and directed his feature film debut *The Creek* in 2006. In 2008 the film was released to all major DVD outlets through Ryko Distribution & Indie-Pictures. *The Creek* received Best Horror Feature, Illinois International Film Festival 2007 and Official Selection, Full Moon Film Festival, Milwaukee County Massacre Horror Convention, Atlanta Horrorfest, Spooky Movie Film Festival, Wildwood By the Sea Film Festival, Ava Gardner Film Festival. Erik runs his production company Annubis Productions through which he has helmed a music video, worked on a video project for the New York chapter of SMPTE, compressed web videos for McGraw-Hill and pursues independent feature film.

Bill Simone, Director of Photography for *12 Bells* is located in central Pennsylvania with over 20 years of experience behind cameras of all types both still and motion. Bill has built an impressive reputation amongst "A list" clients and advertising agencies both regionally and nationally. After many successful TV spots, corporate films and campaigns, Bill has engaged in a long standing desire to shoot documentary and feature films.

As Director of Photography, Bill owns and shoots with a complete Red One production package. He also has extensive grip and crew support.

Visit him on the web at:
<http://www.billsimone-dp.com>
or <http://www.billsimonephotography.com>.





The Final

Agora Entertainment and Final Fate Features is proud to announce the completion of their revenge-driven horror movie, *The Final*. Written and produced by Jason Kabolati (*Pendulum*, *Mad Bad*) and helmed by first time director Joey Stewart, *The Final* stars Marc Donato (*Degrassi* tv series, *White Oleander*), Jascha Washington (*Big Momma's House 2*) and Julin (*Spirit Camp*).

The Final is a terrifying story that follows a group of high school outcasts who host a costume party and employ an arsenal of physical and psychological torture to avenge the years of humiliation and torment they suffered at the hands of the popular students.

Shares director Joey Stewart, "The Final is about being picked-on, bullied and tormented, and the retaliation and revenge that it incurs. As the outcasts begin to feel that life has no meaning, they make a pact for revenge and suicide that they believe will teach these kids a valuable life lesson. It's about what happens when people are pushed to the brink of despair, and the consequences the responsible parties must face."

The Final is directed by Joey Stewart, a seasoned producer and first assistant director whose credits include *A Killer Within*, *The Anarchist's Cookbook* and the forthcoming Warner Bros. web series *Exposed*. Joining Stewart are cinematographer Dave McFarland (*Cult*, *Your Name Here*) and production designer Eric Whitney (*The Beacon*, *American Nightmare*).

The Final is looking toward a winter release on DVD. The official website and trailer will be coming soon.

Australian release announced for Hayao Miyazaki's latest masterpiece

Madman Entertainment is thrilled to announce PONYO the latest film from world-renowned Japanese animation legend Hayao Miyazaki, will release in cinemas across the country on August 27.

PONYO was written and directed by the Academy Award® winning filmmaker (*Spirited Away*, *Howl's Moving Castle*) and follows the magical story of a young overeager goldfish who falls in love after being rescued by a boy named Sotaro, and sets out on a quest beneath the ocean to become human so they may be together.

The film, inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's classic tale *The Little Mermaid*, is the latest release from the Japanese animation powerhouse Studio Ghibli which was co-founded by Miyazaki.

There are two versions of PONYO being screened internationally, the original Japanese version with English subtitles and an English dubbed film which features the voice talent of Cate Blanchett, Matt Damon, Tina Fey, Frankie Jonas, Liam Neeson and Noah Cyrus as Ponyo.

Madman Entertainment will release both versions of PONYO nationally on AUGUST 27.

On July 28, The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences will host the red carpet event, "A Tribute to Animation Master Hayao Miyazaki" in Los Angeles. Media agencies including Reuters and AP will be covering the event for international syndication.

For more information on PONYO visit www.ponyo.com.au



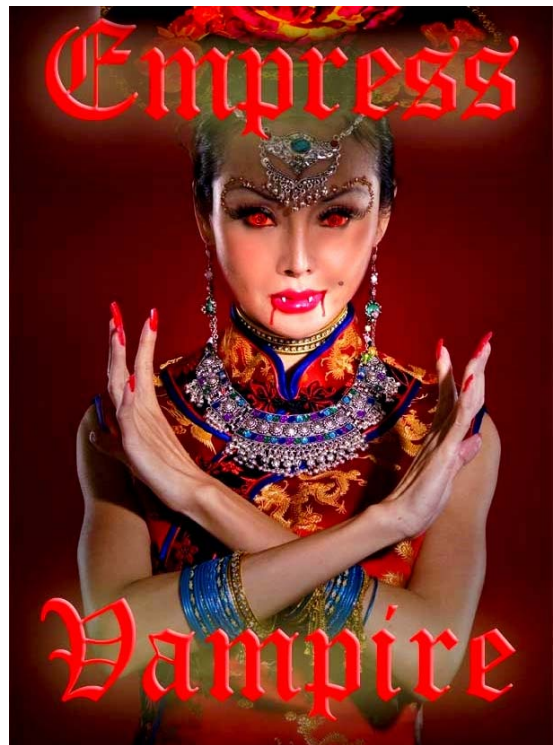
Vampire Empress

Empress Vampire is not your typical vampire movie. In addition to the usual horror, blood, suspense, and thrills, Empress Vampire brings a new level of blood-letting gore, seduction, sensuality, exotic settings, dark humor, and political intrigue. Add to that a unique blend of flowing musical numbers from a fantasy gothic vampire dance ritual to a sensual, seductive Tango musical number, from an exotic middle eastern belly dance to an ancient Chinese lute musical number, and Empress Vampire stimulates all the senses of audience, standing out as a new genre of horror film, destined to become a classic.

Phil Condit and Ange Maya started pre-production in August 2008 and continued for eleven months until early July 2009, when production began. The production wrapped in mid August, after a total of 30 filming days. The film, which includes passages in Mandarin with English subtitles, is now in post-production and will be edited to R-rating standards.

Empress Vampire stars Ange Maya, Tom Cochran, Beau Nelson, Laura Cotenescu, and Garrett Brawith. Co-starring: Zachary Ryan Block, Jake Jacobs, Megan Cordero, J. C. Achilles. Featuring: Tina Tanzer, Rachael Owens, Gary Private, Dillon C. McCarty, Beverly Swanson, Shanna Beauchamp, Daniella Love, Clint Jung, Chad Curtis Wood, Martin Bell, Britt Prentice, Ric Baron, Betty Sindayen, Sonam Arvind Dhage, Andrea Ellsworth, Jesse Wang, Don Chao, Aoni Ma, Stephanie Lopez, and many more.

The revelry of an upscale Halloween party is shattered by gunshots as two armed robbers attempt to fleece the well-to-do patrons of their money and jewels. A diminutive, cloaked figure steps out of the crowd of revelers. In a brief display of superhuman powers, the figure effortlessly kills the two robbers, despite being shot repeatedly. When news of these events reaches Washington D. C., FBI agent Dan Higgins is dispatched to track down the figure and enlist their aid in furthering the agenda of the United States abroad. Agent Higgins enlists the aid of a hunter and a psychic who are also intent on tracking down the figure. Who is tracking who becomes serious when they realize they are attempting to track down a vampire, and not just any vampire,



but the Source Vampire – the one from who of all other vampires descended – Empress Vampire!

The Empress is far more than a mere vampire. No power on earth can stop her. And she craves more than mere blood; she is carnal as well as carnivorous. But is she the evil one, or is she being sought by a more malevolent force?

What ensues is a twisting path tracking down the Empress and, once found, the harrowing encounters and intense struggles between her, the government, and the team of hunters. It is filled with greed and power, romance and seduction, lust and slash, revenge and religion, humor and horror. What will come from such a deadly game of cat and mouse when the government finds it cannot control the power of the Empress?

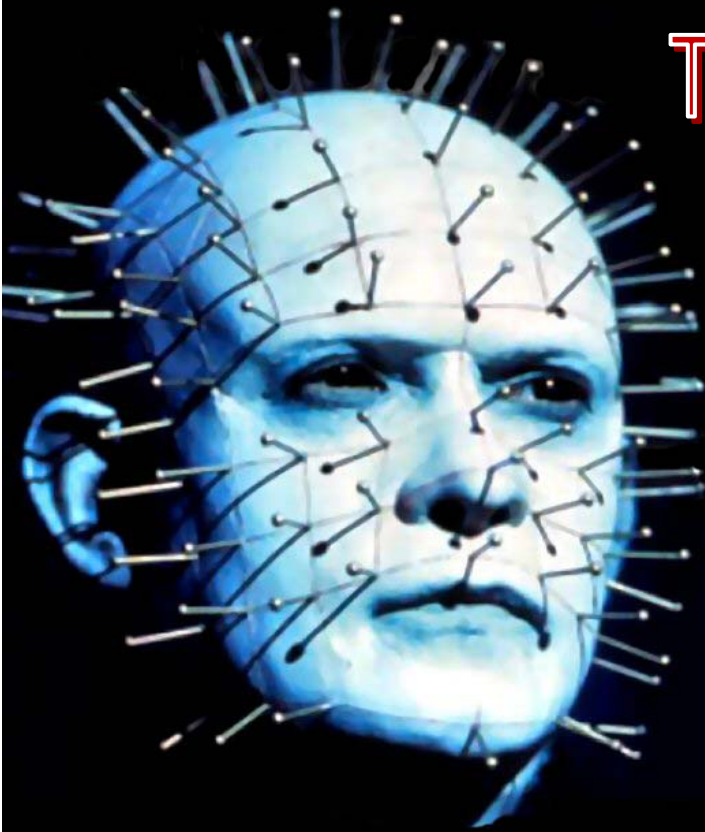
Not for the squeamish or easily offended, Empress Vampire is a journey into darkness – the darkness of hell unleashed on earth, the darkness of primal desires run amok, the darkness of human greed, and the darkness of the perversion of the ultimate vampire.

The movie is scheduled for World Premiere at the 2010 Cannes Film Festival, and will make the circuit of other major festivals.

Web: [Http://www.EmpressVampire.com](http://www.EmpressVampire.com)

The Dark Imagination

of Clive Barker



My enthusiasm as an artist is rooted not in any particular medium, but in the act of imagining. My books, films, drawings and plays, thought they may seem to be very disparate in content, are still mapping out different parts of the same landscape: that is to say, the world between my ears, I am motivated to write or paint by the images and scenes which arise from my subconscious, without invitation, which seems on closer inspection to dramatize elements of my deeper self.

I am a Jungian, not a Freudian. I believe that a collective unconscious--a pool of shared images and stories which all humanity is heir to--exist, and the artist dealing in the fantastique is uniquely placed, in that he or she can create stories or paintings which dramatize the eruption of the unconscious into our day to day lives.

I've pointed out many times that we spend one-third of our lives asleep. During the adventure of dreaming, we are making both a private investi-

gations into our hopes and fears and also swimming in the dream pool, which we share with the rest of our species.



I hope that the fiction I write will empower us to both comprehend our secret dream selves and understand the profound intimacy we share with every other human being.

Clive Barker

I have seen the future of horror, his name is Clive Barker

Stephen King

Clive Barker was born near Liverpool, England in 1952. After attending junior school he entered Liverpool University to study English Literature and Philosophy. At twenty-one, he moved to London. During his time in London he formed the Hydra theatre company to perform his plays and worked there as writer, director, and actor through his twenties.

Most of these early plays display strong erotic,

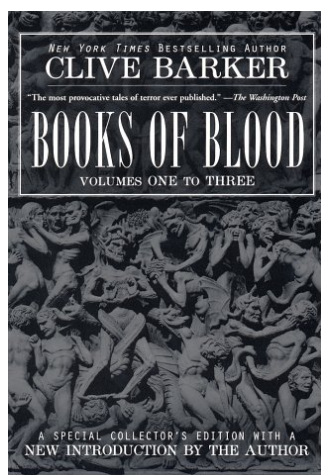
fantasy and horror elements that would later become the staple of his career.

Some of these early works include *History of the Devil*, *Frankenstein in Love*, *Subtle Bodies*, *The Secret Life of Cartoons*, and the life of Goya in *Colossus*. Harper Publishing has put together *The History of the Devil*, *Frankenstein in Love* and *Colossus* in a collection entitled *Incarnations*.

Everybody is a book of blood; Wherever we're opened, we're red.

Books of Blood, Clive Barker

Barker began to explore the darker themes in a series of short stories; these were published as the *Books of Blood*, Volumes 1-3. They achieved excellent reviews in the US and were quickly followed by his first novel, *The Damnation Game*. Three novels followed – *The Inhuman Condition*, *In the Flesh* and *Cabal*. (They were released in the UK as *Books of Blood* Volumes 4-6). His work began to receive worldwide attention for its imaginative quality and was translated into many languages.



Curiously, horror fiction hasn't really dealt with sex. Certainly there are horror novels that use sex as light relief, but a lot of my stories have very strong sexual subtexts and can't be interpreted outside the subtext. You have to embrace the sexual meaning of the stories before you can really understand them. I don't think that had been done as passionately as I did it in the 'Books of Blood'.

Clive Barker: Anarchic Prince Of Horror

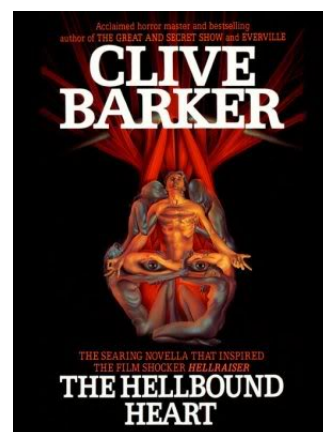
His explorations of fantasy and horror were matched with an openness to the fluidity of gender and sexuality which made his fiction quite unique. From Lovecraft onwards so much horror fiction seemed either to ignore the body altogether or demonize it, and Barker seemed to open the door to the role of the erotic in horror writing, certainly in an explicit sense.

In 2003, Clive Barker received The Davidson/Valentini Award at the 15th GLAAD Media

Awards. This award is presented "to an openly lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender individual who has made a significant difference in promoting equal rights for any of those communities".

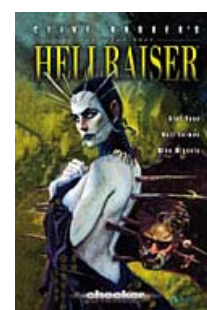
In 1987 he wrote the screenplays for two of his stories which were directed by George Pavlou. These films, *Rawhead Rex* and *Transmutations* did not receive good reviews and to be blunt, were pretty awful. Barker disliked them immensely and decided if you want something done right, you better do it yourself. Accordingly he decided to direct the next film himself.

He took his short story *The Hellbound Heart* and expanded it into *Hellraiser*. He worked with his friend Doug Bradley to flesh out the figure which became Pinhead. Resonances of this figure can be found in some of his earlier experimental films such as - *The Forbidden*. *Hellraiser* became an instant success and was followed by many sequels. Most would argue that the first three were the best with the rest not offering anything new to the mythos. Barker also developed his story *Cabal* into *Nightbreed*, which is still one of the best dark fantasy films ever made; in my mind it is very underrated.



These were followed by further novels by Barker including *Weaveworld* and *The Great and Secret Show*.

Since Barker tends to write in a "visual" style with well described lush landscapes, scenes and images, his work has been easily adapted into both comics and graphic art.



Just some of the huge range of comics and graphic novels based on his work include the Marvel/Epic series *Hellraiser*, *Nightbreed*, *Pinhead*, *The Harrowers*, *Book of the Damned* and *Jihad*. Eclipse Books' series and graphic novels *Tapping The Vein*, *Dread*, *Son of Celluloid*, *Revelations: The Life of Death*, *Rawhead Rex*,

and *The Yattering and Jack*; and Dark Horse Comics' *Primal*, among many others.

In 2005 IDW published a three-issue adaptation of Barker's children's fantasy novel *The Thief of Always*, written and coloured by Kris Oprisko and Gabriel Hernandez. They are also publishing *The Great and Secret Show* and at present are up to Issue 2.



Many of his characters have also been adapted into toys and collectibles, especially those from the *Hellraiser* series, Pinhead being a favourite. Barker also developed a unique range of figures called *Tortured Souls*, for McFarlane toys. They have been issued in two series and come with related dioramas. *Feverish* is one of the figures from *Tortured Souls Series 2: The Fallen*, *Feverish* is a grotesquely large creature on a slab giving birth to worms. It is 3 inches tall and 6 inches in length on slab and jointed at the neck, right shoulder (ball joint), right wrist and hips. It comes complete with portable surgical slab on rollers, armed apparatus which attaches to the slab and is articulated. It also features several birthing/feeding demons on chains. For a change it was the toys themselves that spurred Barker into developing the plot for a film. It is currently under development, though with no firm details, and is to be called *Tortured Souls: Animae Damntiae*.

There have also been various computer games based on his work including some early titles based on *Nightbreed*, such as an action and an interactive movie game named after the movie (1990). Other titles include *Undying* (2001) and



The strange art of Clive Barker

Jericho (2007). There have even been some card games and board games.

Barker is certainly a well rounded artist, exploring cinema, writing and various graphic styles. He has produced various works of art which are primitive, powerful and challenging in content. These can be seen in collections of his works, such as *Clive Barker, Illustrator*, published in 1990 by Arcane/Eclipse Books, and *Visions of Heaven and Hell*, published in 2005 by Rizzoli books.

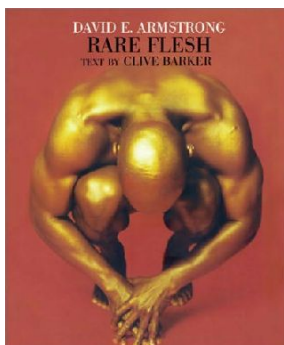
His next work moved from horror more into the fantasy genre, *Imajica* and this was followed by *The Thief of Always* which combined both illustration and a children's fable.

Candyman was a return to horror, based on his short story "*The Forbidden*", combining a tale about the Deep South and racism with a horror story. It was excellent film and was followed by an equally impressive sequel, *Candyman: Farewell to the Flesh*. Later this was followed by *Candyman: Day of the Dead*, which did not offer anything especially new to the series.

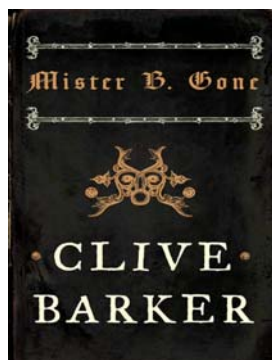
Barker continued to write producing such novels as *Galilee*, *Everville*, *Sacrament* and *Coldheart Canyon*. He also continued his exploration of fantasy in the *Abarat* series. It is really quite amazing how Barker is equally comfortable writing fantasy stories for children on one hand and savage horror and transgressive fantasy on the other.

The Lord of Illusions was another successful film which he wrote, directed and co-produced in 1995.

In 2003 Barker and his partner photographer David Armstrong together published *Rare Flesh* which combined taboo-breaking erotic photography with Barkers prose. This dynamic work is an intensely collaborative effort between Armstrong and Barker, who are life-partners, as the text delves into themes of love, betrayal, loneliness, and redemption.



In 2007 he released a further novel called *Mister B. Gone* and has also produced various short stories and limited editions novellas along the way. He is a prolific writer, artist and dark visionary.

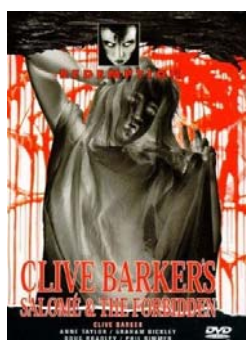


Barker continues to dream, write, direct and draw and lives with his partner photographer David Armstrong and their daughter Nicole in Los Angeles.

The Film's of Clive Barker

The Forbidden

The Forbidden dates from between 1975 and 1978. In it Pete Atkins plays Faust, who is flayed toward the end of the film. It is experimental in style and was shot using techniques to make the film negative appear to be a positive and then a negative was made off the positive. It is silent with a music score. It is interesting as it is here we see the very first hint of what was to become *Hell-raiser*, a block with a large number of 6" nails in it.



The cast includes Peter Atkins, Clive Barker, Doug Bradley (who would later play Pinhead), Phil Rimmer, Lyn Darnell and Julie Blake. The

plot of the *Forbidden* was based on the legend of Faust. *The Forbidden* is 35 minutes in length.

Salome

Salome comes from the same time as *The Forbidden* and was based on the play by Oscar Wilde. Doug Bradley appears in *Salome* as King Herod, other cast include Anne Taylor, Graham Bickley, Clive Barker, Phil Rimmer, Lyn Darnell, Susan Bickley and Julie Blake. *Salome* is 18 minutes in length.

These two early films are available together on a DVD from Redemption films. It is out of production but can be purchased second hand.

Transmutations (Underworld)

"All Mutants are not created Equal"

Transmutations was released in 1985 by Vestron Video and was an Empires Pictures production. Clive Barker wrote the film script which was directed by George Pavlou and produced by Kevin Attew and Don Hawkins. It has never been released on DVD, though some DVD-R copies exist.



It is one of the worst science fiction films you are likely to see. The sheer horror of seeing his script turned into such a mess later drove Barker to move into directing himself. It stars Denholm Elliot and Miranda Richardson but even they could not make up for the terrible directing.

High class working girl Nicole is kidnapped from her brothel so businessman Hugo Motherskille hires her ex-lover Roy Bain to find her. Investigating the disappearance, he eventually traces a lead to Dr. Savary. Dr. Savary is a sinister biochemist, who has produced a strange white powder that's coveted by a race of deformed human beings who live in the sewers below the city.

It seems they are all addicted to Savary's pleasure-producing drug, but it has a truly shocking side effect, grotesque disfigurement!

Rawhead Rex

Rawhead Rex was the second screenplay from Barker and the first adaptation of a story from "The Books of Blood". It was released in 1987 by Vestron video. Again it was directed by George Pavlou and produced by Kevin Atew, who did a little better this time; at least it is watchable ! A DVD edition was released by Pioneer in 1999 and while out of production is readily available second hand.

While Pavlou works hard to keep to the screenplay written by Barker and even includes some of the more powerful moments from the short story, such as the devouring of Hellenbeck's son, the major problem is the limited budget. Due to a lack of funds the special effects used to create Rawhead are pretty average, to say the least..



Rawhead Rex is imprisoned for eternity by an ancient seal in a barren field near the hamlet of Rathmore, Ireland. In time, as faith wanes, his gruesome visage and violent crimes have been forgotten. Indeed he has been dismissed as simply another pre-Christian folk tale. However, one day Tom Garron decides to plough a field that has until now remained fallow due to a belief that it is cursed. The seal is broken, the creature is unleashed and the carnage begins. Howard Hallenbeck, an American historian, discovers a series of scenes illustrating the reign of terror of Rawhead Rex on the stained glass windows of a local church. But the piece of glass

depicting the defeat of the monster is missing. Howard must decipher the answer before the rampage goes any further.

Hellraiser

By this time Barker had become very tired of trusting his vision to others only to have them destroy it. He decided to be both director and screenwriter with David Saunders and Christopher Figg as joint producers. *Hellraiser* was released in 1987 by New World Productions and changed the face of horror forever. It is available in innumerable DVD editions in all regions. Frank (Sean Chapman) is a sexual adventurer, he is not satisfied with the experiences the world can offer and is always looking to push the boundaries in every way he can. His desire calls out beyond time and space and he is led to purchase a mysterious puzzle box in an unnamed Third World country. It is beautifully carved and simply touching it seems to enliven the nerves and touch the soul. Frank takes it back to England and begins to sensuously explore the box. As he tenderly touches it, it changes configuration and hooks fly out of the box ripping him apart.

It seems the box is an inter-dimensional doorway to another reality. A world inhabited by the Cenobites, creatures who explore the nuances of pain and pleasure for eternity. Frank through his fervent desire has called them and through the box has been pulled into their world. While Frank now exists in a permanent state of pain and pleasure in the Cenobites kingdom, a small amount of his remains survive under the floorboards of the attic in his family's traditional home.

Many years later Frank's brother Larry (Andrew Robinson), convinces his wife Julia (Clare Higgins) and his daughter Kirsty to return to the

Julia and the regenerating Frank





family home. Julia and Larry are having marriage problems and he wants them to give it one more chance. Julia is Kirsty's stepmother and there is no love lost between them. Unbeknownst to Larry Julia once had an affair with Frank and when she finds some of his belongings in the attic yearns for his return. She soon gets her wish, but in a way she never expected.

As Larry is repairing the house, he cuts his hand and blood drips onto the attic floor. This begins Frank's regeneration, which is presented in one of the more astounding sequences of cinema, especially for the time it was made. Frank convinces Julia to bring home would-be lovers so he can drain their life from them and return to the world of the living. However, what Frank does not appreciate is that the Cenobites do not like being tricked and as he attempts to return to the material world, the whole family is drawn into the mystery of the puzzle box and the strange world of the Cenobites.

Hellraiser was an instant success; it became one of the most celebrated cult horror films of all time. It combines themes of sex, love, passion, pain and death into a mix which is truly intoxicating. The Cenobites are quite unique and very different from traditional "demons"; this is a horror film which breaks new ground. Gone are the old world scares of demons and hell, replaced with S & M creatures and a strange otherworldly dimension.

Pinhead, the leader of the Cenobites, became one of the most memorable horror icons to

come out of the 80s horror craze. He is such a mixture of sadist and moralist. On one hand he is more than willing to mutilate, kill and torture, but on the other will only do so if "called" through the box. There are rules to the game and Pinhead makes sure they are enforced rigorously.

Doug Bradley's performance as Pinhead is superb and he creates a truly unique character which is now an essential part of cult horror history.

When you combine his looks with the strange cinematography and sado-masochistic overtones

you have a very unique cinematic experience, one which continues to impress even today.

Hellraiser Themes and Imagery

The uniqueness of Hellraiser comes from a combination of very special elements. Some of the most pertinent are the relationship between sex and death and the imagery of Pinhead, the Cenobites and the Puzzle Box.

I thought I'd gone to the limits. I hadn't. The Cenobites gave me an experience beyond limits... pain and pleasure, indivisible.

Frank

Sex and Death have always been intertwined; Sigmund Freud argued that there were two psychological drives in operation in our lives the Eros drive (sex) and the Thanatos drive (death). One leads towards life affirmation, one leads towards oblivion. Horror in many ways taps into both these drives offering us thrills

Sexually adventurous Frank



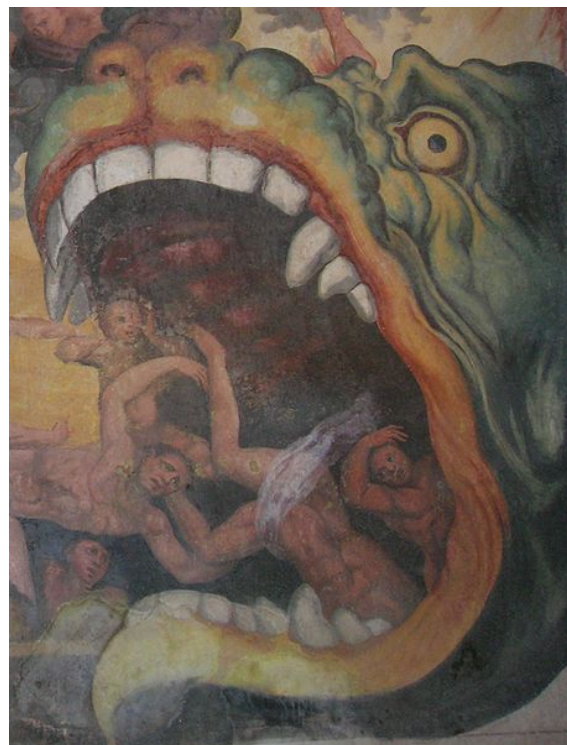
which are both exciting and frightening, alluring and terrifying. These themes have been explored in horror from its very origins but they really only became explicit during the Eighties horror explosion. The basic format of the slasher with scantily clad teens being slaughtered with a large knife makes it clear there is a sexual dynamic in play. Even more so when the first ones killed are those having sex and the one who survives is nearly always a virgin.

In *Hellraiser* these motifs become more obvious. Julia is sexually frustrated, Larry is sexually incompetent, while Frank is just plain sexual, a man to die for ! He oozes sex appeal and smoulders. The Cenobites wear leather outfits, use chains, whips and hooks and look like S & M figures who have gone way too far. While modern practitioners of sado-masochism would not advocate tearing someone apart with hooks, the fetishism of the Cenobites is obvious. The modus operandi of the whole film is that unsatisfied desire opens the door to the Cenobites.

The term Cenobite also offers us a hint at Barker's ideas about sex and death. Cenobitic monasticism is a monastic tradition that stresses community life regulated by religious precepts. This form of monasticism is found primarily in Christian and Buddhist communities. In these mystical traditions sexuality is suppressed and emotions are redirected towards the common good using individual meditation of various forms. In Buddhism meditation on wrathful deities (many which have strong sex and death iconography) is used to sublimate sexual desire.

The Cenobites in *Hellraiser* are a mirror image of this tradition; they are a community united together in the pursuit of the ultimate boundaries of pleasure and pain. They sublimate their

Yamantaka: Tibetan Buddhist Wrathful Deity



Leviathan
Giacomo Rossignolo (1524-1604), Italy

humanity to become more than human and use desire in a novel and startling manner. They are regulated by a strict set of rules and regulations.

The Cenobites worship Leviathan and live within his Labyrinth. Leviathan and the labyrinth are a further elaboration of the myth of the Cenobites offered in *Hellraiser II* and *III*. In legend Leviathan is the lord of the deep sometimes being synonymous with a huge sea monster or creature. The labyrinth is related to the coils of the body of Leviathan and also seen as a giant maze. In Jungian psychology, the deep is the unconscious where desire reigns supreme and the maze is the again the unconscious where we become lost in our emotions and primal drives. Again and again Barker reinforces the sex and death imagery using layer upon layer of symbolism and iconography.

The Puzzle Box

The Puzzle Box is a fascinating literary invention by Barker; indeed it is as significant to the *Hellraiser* tales as Pinhead. The box itself is known in the films as the Lament Configuration, while in Barker's books it is called "the Lemarchand Box". It is an antique lacquered cube which is engraved with stylized patterns. It looks Chinese in origin but the patterns



seem to reflect a myriad of cultures. To open the box can take days or weeks; it can only be opened by desire, not by money or simple curiosity. This is highly significant as in *Hellraiser II* Dr.Channard attempts to alleviate his risk at using the box by utilizing a young unstable girl to solve the puzzle. When the Cenobites arrive and attempt to retrieve whoever has solved the puzzle Pinhead redirects them to Dr.Channard and remind them that it is “hearts that call us, not hands”.

In the “The Hellbound Heart” Barker offers us a description of the box:

The interior surfaces were brilliantly polished. Frank's reflection — distorted, fragmented — skated across the lacquer.... Lemarchand, who had been in his time a maker of singing birds, had constructed the box so that opening it tripped a musical mechanism, which began to tinkle a short rondo of sublime banality.

And there was music too; a simple tune emerged from the box, played on a mechanism that she could not yet see. Enchanted, she delved further. Though one piece had been removed, the rest did not come readily. Each segment presented a fresh challenge to fingers and mind, the victories rewarded with a further filigree added to the tune.

When the puzzle is solved, a doorway to the Labyrinth is opened, a large bell tolls, lights dim and the fabric between this world and the next is temporarily torn asunder as the Cenobites make their appearance.



The boxes were created by Philip Lemarchand, who is mentioned in *The Hellbound Heart* as a maker of mechanical singing birds. The image of the puzzle box and its creator is a fascinating combination of the simple and the repugnant, matching the childlike beauty of a toy with pain and suffering and a gateway to another world.

In the graphic novels Lemarchand is portrayed as an older man who is a creator of toys and singing birds. He is also a serial killer who uses human fat and bone in the construction of his boxes as well as an unknown substance supplied to him by a Cenobite known as Baron.

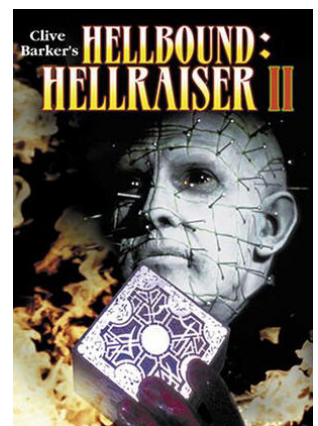
In The film *Hellraiser: Bloodline*, Lemarchand seems to have been revamped for film. He is seen as a young ingenious toymaker known for his intricate mechanical designs. In later films various other boxes are also shown (including a selection owned by Dr.Channard in *Hellraiser II*), but these are not named nor are their powers explained.

It is quite fascinating to see how these puzzle boxes have tapped into popular imagination. Just like there are many Pinhead toys, dolls and collectibles, there are a vast number of puzzle box recreations. Pyramid Gallery, for example, <http://www.pyramid-gallery.com/> even makes intricate musical boxes exploring a range of related designs.

Hellbound: Hellraiser II

Hellraiser II was released in 1988, produced by Clive Barker and directed by Tony Randel. It picks up just as *Hellraiser* left off. Kirsty is now in a mental institution after the carnage at the family home.

The police hold her to be their prime suspect





Dr.Channard faces the Cenobites head-on

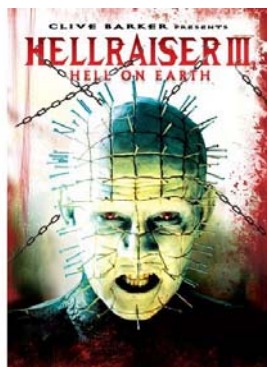
not taking seriously talk about a puzzle box and monsters from another world. Her psychiatrist is Dr.Channard, whose professional exterior masks a lifelong fascination with the occult and, you guessed it, the Lament configuration and the Cenobites. As Channard hears Kirsty's story he knows he has found what he is looking for and has the blood drenched mattress moved from the scene of the crime to his home. In a harrowing scene he allows a mentally ill patient to use a straight razor and with a flood of blood onto the bed Julia is returned to the world of the living.

Of course she needs blood and lots of it before she can take a more appealing form, some of the loving moments between Channard and the half reformed Julia are truly startling. With Julia at his side Dr.Channard wishes to open a doorway to the Labyrinth. As Tiffany, a traumatized child opens the box, Channard finds himself in unknown territory.

This is a surprisingly impressive sequel which uses the imagery of a hospital and mental institution to great effect. It expands the story to explore the Labyrinth and the world of Leviathan and really moves further into dark fantasy than the first film.

Hellraiser III

Released in 1992, produced by Clive Barker and directed by Antony Hickox, Hellraiser III takes the Hellraiser franchise into more traditional horror territory. J.P. Monroe (Kevin Bernhardt) is an unstable



psychopath; who killed his parents and uses women as playthings.

He is the owner of a New York bondage-styled club called the Boiler Room. Monroe is always on the lookout for perverse and violent art objects for his club and hears of a new boutique store which focuses on such items. Here he finds an exquisite item, a torture tower etched with twisted faces and designs— it is actually the pillar or tower seen at the end of *Hellbound: Hellraiser II* and hidden among the designs is the face of Pinhead.

Joey Summerskill (Terry Farrell) is a young fresh television newswoman searching for her big break. She haunts the local hospitals looking for stories which may change her career because she knows her sexist boss won't assign her any big stories. She is shocked to see a young man brought into the hospital who seems to have unseen hooks ripping his flesh

The Hellraiser Pillar (of Parts II and III)





J.P. gets the Cenobite treatment in Hellraiser III

apart; as he explodes she knows she is onto a big story.

She follows the trail back to J.P. and his club and finds Terri, a come-and-go girlfriend of J.P. who not only knows about the pillar but also a lot more. Terri decides to give Joey an item she is not sure what to do with, - the puzzle box.

While Terri and Joey are having their heart to heart, J.P. has spilt some blood on the pillar and Pinhead has awakened. He demands the blood of a young girl and J.P. is happy to oblige – hey, he killed his parents, what the hell is one more death. However, as soon as Pinhead is set free he does not give J.P. quite what he expects. Pinhead and crew invade the club and the slaughter begins. This time, sadly, the Cenobites are not quite as impressive, while interesting they are a little more mainstream than those in *Hellraiser I* and *II*.

There are a lot of interesting twists and turns in the story including the ghost of Joey's father and the back story of Pinhead himself. It ends as Joey submerges the box in a wet cement foundation of a new tower block. However the building erected upon it ends up having puzzle-box designs as decor and you know you are in for something more terrible than Pinhead, a further sequel. While *Hellraiser III* is an interesting and innovative film, it is beginning to lose some of the more unique characteristics of the earlier films.

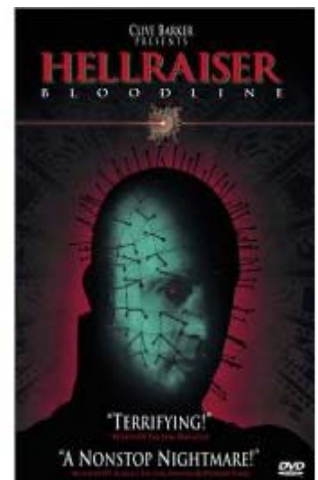
It is rumoured that since Miramax had purchased the rights for this film they demanded changes to make it all more mainstream (how

do you make *Hellraiser* mainstream?). Sadly, it didn't work, especially when you see what comes next!

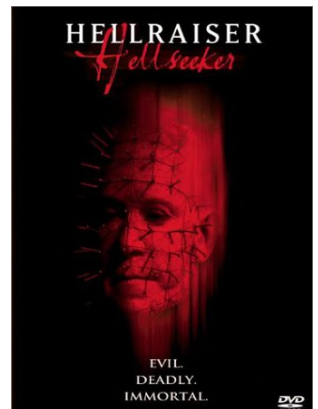


The first three films are available in a superb puzzle box set from Anchor Bay in both region 2 (UK) and R1 (US). It includes the restored 20th Anniversary edition of *Hellraiser* and *Hellraiser II* and *III*.

Hellraiser should have really ended a trilogy. The series continued with *Hellraiser 4: Bloodline* which is listed as being directed by Alan Smithee, a name regularly used by directors who are dissatisfied with the final film. In this case the director was special effects man Kevin Yagher.



While Barker was the executive producer, the film really became Pinhead in space. It opens in the year 2127 with a group of soldiers aboard Space Station Minos and scientist Paul Merchant is experimenting with an antique puzzle-box. This was followed by a further four films: *Inferno*, *Hellseeker*, *Deader* and *Hellworld*, the less said about these the better. They are fairly average horror slasher-type films which simply use the imagery of the first three films to hang stories on. Sad really.



Dimension Films is working to develop a remake of the original *Hellraiser* but it seems to be in a state of flux. It began as Clive Barker developed a new screenplay but this was rejected by Dimension. Then Julien Maury and Alexandre Bustillo, the directors of the French horror film *Inside*, were supposed to write and

direct the *Hellraiser* remake with the backing of Barker, but they withdrew. The directors of *Feast* were also supposedly in on the deal but left the project citing major creative differences with Dimension films. Finally French filmmaker Pascal Laugier, director of *Martyrs* was attached to the new film, even offering public statements about his vision for the film.

However, recently even Laugier as director has been brought into question. Word coming from the Twitter account run by Clive Barker is that Laugier is no longer involved.

"Pascal Laugier is regrettably no longer on the Hellraiser remake. I think Martyrs is extraordinary, I don't know much more. I mean why would anyone tell me? I mostly discover these things here or through friends who still buy the trades." Barker adds: "Sorry, did that sound cynical? Yeah? Good."

So as with all remakes, anything is possible, it is just a shame they can't leave such a classic film alone.

Nightbreed

Nightbreed was a superb dark fantasy film, directed by Clive Barker and released in 1990. Sadly the current edition on DVD is heavily cut and Barker (and many fans) have been pushing for a director's cut to be released.

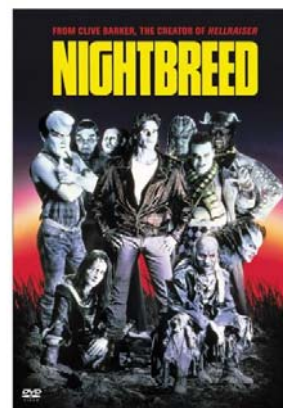
Many cut scenes have been recovered and the original cut included over 200 monsters created by Image animation. It has been estimated there is between 25-45 minutes of footage missing from the film and it is not surprising some reviewers felt the current release was somewhat disjointed and badly edited.

Killing in the name of purity



The nocturnal race of Midian

Nightbreed is based on Barker's novella *Cabal*. The story involves the plight of Aaron Boone Craig Sheffer, a young man tormented by visions of monstrous, nocturnal creatures and dreams of violent carnage.



He is being treated by psychiatrist Dr. Decker (David Cronenberg) using therapy and medication.

Decker leads Boone to believe that during his blackouts he is undertaking the various murders reported in local newspapers. However the truth is that Decker himself is the killer and has been drugging Boone to cover his own tracks and in the hopes Boone will lead him to Midian.

Midian is an isolated subterranean city where a race of nocturnal beings live separate from the bulk of humanity. They live by their own laws and codes and avoid contact with humans who they see as a grave threat. They are mutants and have their own physical forms, sexual preferences and ways of life.

Decker is on a quest to "purify" the world of impurity and has been killing families and individuals who do not live up to his standard. He knows of Midian and the goal of his life is to destroy it and kills all its occupants before its hideous impurity spreads.

When Boone is lead to Midian by his dreams he sets into play a conflict which will result in the



death of the Nightbreed and a confrontation with those who in their self-righteous arrogance believe that their view of the world is the right one.

Nightbreed can be read on one level as an allegory of the forces of religious intolerance against sexual minorities.

The Nightbreed are quite explicitly sexually ambiguous and live as a “sub-culture” separate from the mainstream. Dr. Decker is impressive as the violent religious zealot wishing to cleanse the world of impurity backed up by local red-necks who want to go huntin’ freaks.

The name Midian actually comes from the Old Testament and was a land bordered by the Arabah and the Red Sea. It was a pagan state which worshipped a multitude of gods, including Baal and the goddess Asherah. Their religion was fertility-oriented in direct opposition to the militarism of the Jewish state. One can readily see how Barker used the name to add a further layer of meaning to the film.

The Candyman Series

“Stand in front of the mirror, turn off the light, and chant the word “Candyman” five times. Then he’ll appear behind you... if you believe”.

“Sweets to the Sweet” **Candyman**

“Be my victim” **Candyman**

Candyman was based on Clive Barker’s short story *The Forbidden* and developed into a series of three films. The first film, *Candyman* dates from 1992.

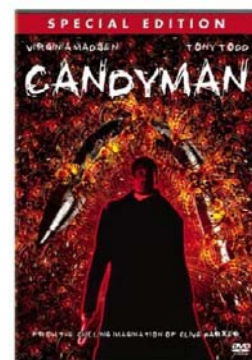
Bernard Rose was the director and Clive Barker was the Executive Producer. It intertwines a tale about urban legends with a ghost story, a detec-



The racial killing that creates the Candyman

tive/noir type investigation and reflections of racial intolerance and America’s dark history.

It is an impressive tale made even more intense by the sheer presence Tony Todd brings to the role. He is both brutal yet tragic at the same time, sensitive and refined and yet bound by fate to take revenge.



The history of Candyman is a fascinating reflection of America’s racism and gives the films a social conscience. It is a story of the son of a slave who got rich by designing a shoe cutting machine in the 1880s.

He was caught having an affair with the daughter of a white plantation owner when she becomes pregnant, her father and his workers cut off his right hand and smear him with honey to let bees sting him to death.



Tony Todd as Candyman

Each of the movies takes a slightly different angle on the story. The first is exploration of urban legends and how disbelief leads its major character, Helen Lyle, to confront Candyman and is grounded in the gang-ridden housing estates where the underprivileged live. The second film, *Candyman: Farewell to the Flesh*, which dates from 1995, focuses on Candyman's revenge on the descendants of those who had him killed and has more supernatural elements than the first.

The third film, *Candyman: Day of the Dead* was released in 1999 and was directed by Turi Meyer. Since Clive Barker had developed the character he is listed in the credits but he actually had nothing to do with the script.

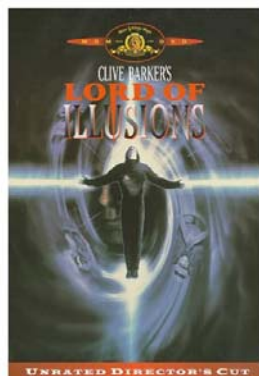
The story follows similar lines to the first Candyman being focused on the Candyman framing someone who refuses to believe in him for a series of murders this time Caroline McKeever. It doesn't especially add much to the original first two films and is somewhat of a letdown.

It has been announced (June 2009) that a further sequel will be made and released direct to DVD in 2010, it is to be called *Candyman: The Tribe*.

Lord of Illusions

Lord of Illusions was written and directed by Clive Barker himself, based on his novella *The Last Illusion*.

It was released in 1995 by MGM/UA and there are both R rated and unrated editions on the market.



It is more mainstream than the other films of Barker, but still certainly packs a punch matching film noir, theatrical magic and the supernatural. It is an interesting tale which focuses on a demonic cult lead by an enigmatic leader called Nix. Even after he has been killed and well and truly buried, his followers decide to bring him back from the dead and soon a supernatural battle entails.

Along the way we are treated to a rather intriguing detective story, a romance and of course

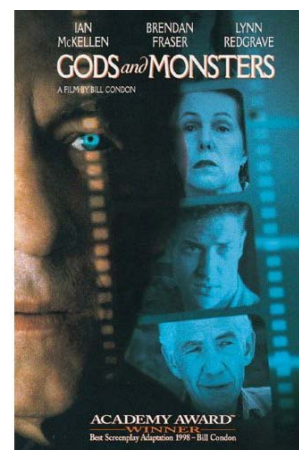


Lord of Illusions, reality is not what it seems..

lots of stage magic. The interplay between fake and real magic and good and evil is nicely explored in a somewhat different type of horror film.

Made for Television

Barker has also been involved in a range of television episodes including *Tales from the Darkside Volume 5: The Yattering and the Jack* (1986) and *Saint and Sinner* (2002) on the Sci Fi Channel, of which he was the executive producer.



He also was involved in two episodes in the *Masters of Horror* series made for Showtime: *Haeckels Tale* and *Valerie on the Stairs*.

Barker was also one of the executive directors on *Gods and Monsters* (1998), the biopic on the life of gay filmmaker James Whale, the father of *Frankenstein*. An interesting departure for Barker but certainly a rewarding one.

Midnight Meat Train (2008)

The *Midnight Meat Train* is based on a short story by Clive Barker which was first published in the *Books of Book Volume 1* published in 1986.

It was on the basis on these three books that Stephen King stated he believed Clive Barker was the future of horror. It is a dark and terrifying journey into madness, conspiracy and an ancient mystery.



Directed by Ryūhei Kitamura, with the screenplay by Jeff Buhler, *The Midnight Meat Train* combines a superb plot with a stunning visual sense. The cinematography of a city at night with its brooding urban sprawl is evocative and suspenseful. The ferocity of the violence is intense with Vinnie Jones as Mahogany, a superbly horrific serial killer. Mahogany is reminiscent of the Tall Man in the *Phantasm* series but has enough unique characteristics not to be derivative.



In many ways this could be said of the whole film; there are a large number of well-used horror motifs but under Ryūhei Kitamura's direction, they become novel and unique.

Photographer Leon Kauffman is on a mission to capture the heart of the city. He believes no one has ever really captured her soul before. After



some prodding from an art critic he decides to explore its underbelly at night. After confronting a gang of thugs up to no good harassing a young beautiful woman, he finds that she is on the pages of the newspaper the next day as a missing person. He goes to the police with his photographs but finds them surprisingly unhelpful even belligerent.

When he returns to the scene the next evening he notices a large hulk of a man exiting the subway. Cold and imposing, he is dressed in a simple charcoal suit and tie carrying a suitcase. Kauffman is fascinated by this character and follows him, only to be violently confronted. He notices a strange ring he is wearing and realizes it is one that is on a photograph he took the night before when the woman went missing.

His fascination soon turns to obsession and he discovers that Mahogany works during the day at a meat packaging plant and at night travelling the subway. Soon Kauffman learns that he does not just travel the subway but at set times and in



set locations slaughters his victims preparing them “butcher” style.

The depictions of the slaughter are powerful and visceral. They are also extremely innovative. In one scene the camera seems to bounce all over the place and then you realize you are seeing what is occurring through the eyes of a head which has just been decapitated!

In another you graphically see teeth, fingernails and eyes removed as bodies are prepared as though they are cuts of prime beef.

Mahogany, however, is not just an other serial killer. He is part of an age-old brotherhood protecting a secret which exists way below the subway. The final scenes of the story are compelling, creating a very different type of climax to that which one may expect from a traditional slasher or horror film. This is a Clive Barker tale!

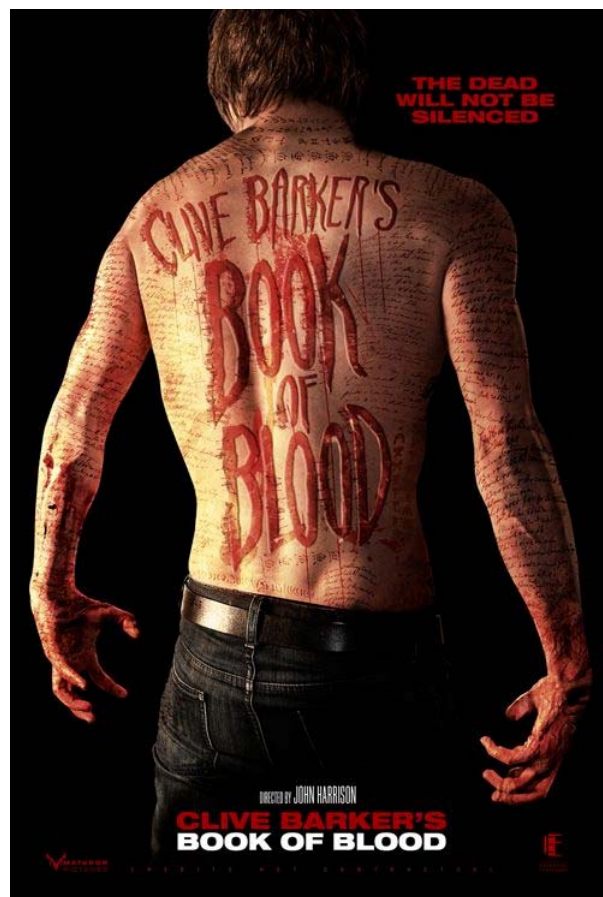
The characters are well developed from the “way of out his depth” Leon Kauffman simply wanting to understand the city to his hapless girlfriend. Vinnie Jones is superb as a “coiled spring” of a man who simply lives to fulfil his mission and does what is required to get the job done with brutal and cold efficiency. Even the train driver is a superbly odd and perverse creature.

The cinematography is remarkable with the constant journeys into the subway mirroring the characters descent into madness. The music has been perfectly scored and really helps sustain the sheer terror of the more horrific killing sprees depicted in the film. The violence and gore is certainly extreme and the R rating is more than warranted, what Mahogany can do with a meat cleaver and butchers tools has to be seen to be believed.

It is great to see the dark visions of Clive Barker meet Japanese-style horror. Ryûhei Kitamura also directed such cult classics as *Versus*, *Azumi* and *Aragami* (among others) and the combination has created a real horror-lovers treat!

The Future ?

What does the future hold for Clive Barker in regards to film ? The remake of the *Hellraiser* film is still very much up in the air however *Candyman: The Tribe* is very much on the books with a release date of 2010.



Book of Blood (2008) awaits a formal release in late 2009. Directed by John Harrison and produced by Clive Barker, it was based on Barker's *Books of Blood* and features two stories, *Book of Blood* and *On Jerusalem Street: A Postscript*.

Leading actors include Jonas Armstrong, Sophie Ward, and Reg Fuller as well as Doug Bradley, James Watson, Simon Bamford, and Romana Abercromby.

While studying Simon McNeal, a medium who claims to be channelling messages from the dead, paranormal researcher Mary Florescu (Sophie Ward) discovers a house that is at the intersection of so-called pathways transporting souls in the afterlife. She recruits McNeal to investigate the house only to find he has become a conduit for souls on their way to the afterlife, souls who carve their stories on his body as a living book of blood.

It is rumoured there are many more Barker films on the way and considering his prodigious output I am sure there will be more to come in all his different fields of endeavour.

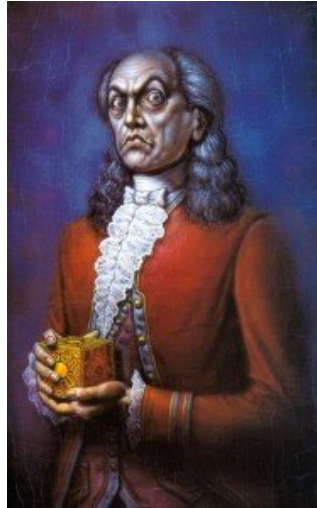
PYRAMID ▲ GALLERY

4602 Barker Boulevard NY, NY 10028



The Pyramid Gallery in New York may look like any other gallery, but it is the last remaining link to the strange sorcery of Philip LeMarchand (1717-).

The below brief biography is taken from *Tucker's Encyclopedia of Mass Murderers*. Philip LeMarchand was a French architect, artisan, and designer who is posthumously credited as possibly one of the most prolific, if undiscovered, mass murderers in the history of the modern world.



He first became known for his creation of bizarre, intricately designed music boxes which quickly became the rage of Europe.

The boxes, known in some circles as LeMarchand Boxes, were each one of a kind creations which were also puzzles, with the answer to one's ultimate hearts desire as their solution. It is believed that LeMarchand created sixteen different boxes. It was one of these, *The Lament Configuration*, which later inspired Clive Barker to write *Hellraiser*, though other boxes are also pictured in some of the later films of the series.

At the height of his career, Paris was besieged by scandalous multiple disappearances of noteworthy individuals, a number of whom had purchased LeMarchand's puzzle boxes.

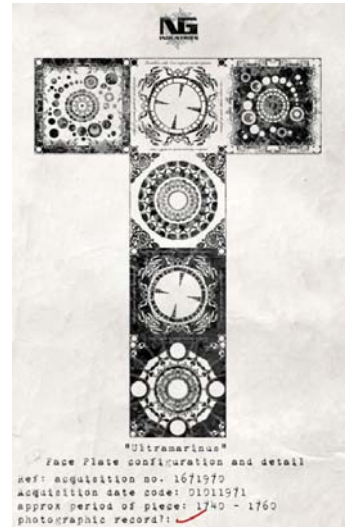
Suspicious, though unconfirmed, fell upon the sculptor / architect, especially inasmuch as LeMarchand's apprentice, the son of a respected clock maker, was one of the first to disappear.



Amidst this notoriety, LeMarchand fled

without selling his home. Apparently certain that the authorities were closing in on him, LeMarchand discarded his already floundering career. It is believed that LeMarchand constructed more than 270 of his puzzle boxes before he vanished in 1811.

Through a strange and convoluted history which includes the involvement of Freemasons, the Illuminati and various other secret organizations the designs for these boxes reached down to the present. A second series of designs which are believed to have been created to block or at least control the gateways created by the LeMarchand boxes were designed by NG Industries and the enigmatic Captain N Green.



Pyramid Gallery is able to offer superb and professional reproductions of the LeMarchand boxes (various designs) as well as NG Industries designs and various others. These are unique handmade productions which take between 4-6 weeks to create.

All configurations are photo etched and professionally painted on #.020 thick metal plates with none of the wood body exposed.

The photo etching process engraves the designs into the brass, leaving a fine depth between the brass designs and the painted surface.

This makes the boxes sturdy and solid, not too delicate for curious hands. Above all, this process produces a beautiful brass replica at a affordable price.

An epoxy based clear coat enamel is then baked onto the metal plates. It proves to be very durable and totally prevents tarnishing.



The Lament Configuration

LeMarchand's first and arguably most classic, puzzle construct. Its complexity was managed by expanding on the design of a similar box designed and constructed by Albertus Magnus in the thirteenth century. When operated properly, a pleasing melody issues from within which belies its true nature.

Tucker's Encyclopedia of Mass Murderers

The Lament Configuration is a box of startling beauty. It reproduces the designs found on the classic box in exquisite detail.

The circular dial, described in LeMarchand's notes as *The Schetrum of the Vamacharins* is now a moveable/wind up feature which plays a haunting tune.

While the box does not change shape and open a doorway to another dimension. And the Pyramid Gallery sadly cannot guarantee egress of the Cenobites into our realm, they can offer one of the very best and most realistic Lament Configuration boxes on the market. It has a superb look and feel with a beauty belying its dark heart.

LeMarchand's workbench



Research, story and images © Pyramid Gallery



The Lost Configuration

Aka The Innocence Puzzle or The Ancient French Box of Eternity.

In September of 2007, The Pyramid Gallery was notified of a strange internet conversation between two video file sharers which pertained to an ongoing investigations into the puzzle box creations of Philip LeMarchand. The on-line discussion centered around a few videos leaked from an 1986 experiment performed by The Rockefeller Foundation. All of the videos featured information on a previously unknown LeMarchand puzzle box known as The Lost Configuration. Ongoing research produced pdf copies of the designs and research files which led to Dr. Alain Stulak, a noted doctor of psychology, linked to the Rockefeller Foundation. His major field of study was that of ancient religious practice and it's basis in psychology. Dr Stulak was reported missing and presumed dead in the late 1980s.

After ongoing research The Pyramid Gallery has been able to reproduce this rare and unique box. It is a design which include Swiss designs and various panels such as the The Cabratal and The Folly Jouhetis panel which encode all manner of esoteric and secret symbolism.

The production on this box is again exquisite. Each panel illustrates the high level of craftsmanship that the artists are able to bring to such superb items. The story behind these boxes make them unusual and significant and boxes of such quality are not often seen on the market. I suggest you get your quickly before fate intervenes. ***What's your Pleasure ?***

The Pyramid Gallery can be best contacted via email at PyramidGallery@sbcglobal.net

FREDDY FOREVER



One, two, Freddy's coming for you. / Three, four, better lock your door. / Five, six, grab your crucifix. / Seven, eight, better stay awake. / Nine, ten, never sleep again.

Freddy is an enigma when it comes to horror icons. He is a child killer brought to justice by a group of vigilante parents who returns to slaughter their progeny in all sorts of brutal ways. At the same time he exists in the popular imagination as an anti-hero; wisecracking and even a bit suave, he is popular with teens and adults alike. While we may wonder about his innocence as the first film begins, as the Franchise evolves his guilt becomes clear, as do his origins.

We learn that his mother was a nurse in a mental institution who was accidentally locked in for the weekend with "100 insane patients," she was brutally raped time and time again and it is from

this act of savagery that Freddy was born. Unable to deal with the tragedy of her life, she becomes a nun and features later in the series.

Craven states that the origins of the Elm Street concept came from a confluence of events in his childhood. Freddy was inspired by a dark seedy man who stared at Craven one night through his window then briskly retreated. The concept of Freddy returning in dreams comes from a number of sources including Craven's studies of Eastern religion and strange tale of Cambodian refugee children who were haunted by nightmares of their experiences under Pol Pot. They refused to sleep and when they were forced to, each one mysteriously died; at least that's what the newspapers claimed! Sounds like another urban legend to me.



The uniqueness of the Elm Street movies is their ability to combine a range of genres into a single narrative. They are both slasher stories

and supernatural tales; they combine a narrative about the angst teenagers feel coming of age with a dark fantasy. This teen angle was able to bring the image of Freddy to a much larger audience than many other horror figures such as Pinhead from *Hellraiser*. While Elm Street still has strong sexual undertones and disturbing psychological themes, they are far more subtle than the obvious sexuality of the *Hellraiser* series. This meant that the series ended up with a strong teen following and with an associated range of collectibles and toys from Freddy dolls and masks to the infamous Freddy glove. It is strange indeed to see children running around with Freddy gloves when they are symbols of a psychopathic child sex killer! In the end Freddy has become the best known figure in slasher film history.

Themes in Nightmare on Elm Street

There is a range of interesting psychological themes which underlie the Elm Street series. The first is that the "sins of the parents are visited on the children", in this case quite literally. While we are all aware of the way in which parents "imprint" their children with their own values (and pathologies), in the Elm Street series the parents have literally passed onto their children a legacy of pain, suffering and death. This legacy also has a strong sexual element.

Freddy seems to primarily attack young nubile teens and "penetrate" them with his sharp knife fingers. In many films he cuts off his fingers time and time again, a strange self mutilation motif with strong phallic significance. While this motif seems primarily heterosexual, in *Nightmare 2: Freddy's Revenge*, the film takes a strange turn and begins to become strangely homo-erotic. It shocked a lot of fans when released and is still the least popular of the Elm Street franchise. Some studies of the series have suggested Freddy represents the sexual neuroses of the parents projected onto their children and perhaps this is why it is so popular; teens can relate to the angst of teenage life and family oppression.

Another interesting connection is with the Scissors Man. The Scissors Man is depicted in many urban myths and legends and is rumoured to cut off



the thumbs of thumb suckers and to do worse to young men who play with the bit in-between. He is described as having scissor-like attachments to his hands and uses them to great advantage. It is intriguing how this myth continues to surface. In Australia there has been a recent urban myth about a man who drives around in a white van picking up children and killing them with scissors and knives. Even though criminologists have time and time again declared this to be an urban myth, reports continue to surface of someone who knows someone who heard it from someone else.

A further interesting link is with Canadian serial killer Peter Woodcock, who was jailed in 1957 for the murder of three young children in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. He officially changed his name to David Michael Krueger in 1982. There is some debate about this as Craven claims he actually took Freddy's surname from a school bully he encountered in his childhood called Fred Krueger so the Woodcock connection may be a coincidence. It is hard to tell as so many myths have developed about the series.

The success of Elm Street has meant the series has continued to sell well with a new adaptation being scheduled for release in 2010. The first movie grossed \$25.5 million dollars in the US. The entire seven movie series grossed \$216 million with "*A Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master*" being the most popular grossing \$49.4 million domestically. Elm Street was not universally welcomed; it was banned outright in Finland and heavily cut in many other countries including Germany.

Nightmare on Elm Street

In the early 1980's, a child killer named Freddy Krueger, also known as the Springwood Slasher, murdered several children with a glove outfitted with straight razor blades attached to the fingers. Due to a technicality the judge set him free. However the parents decided to take matters into their own hands and Krueger was burned alive in the boiler room where he worked and killed. Years after his death, the children whose parents were responsible for Freddy's death are experiencing terrifying nightmares involving a burnt man wearing a glove with razor blades on the fingers.

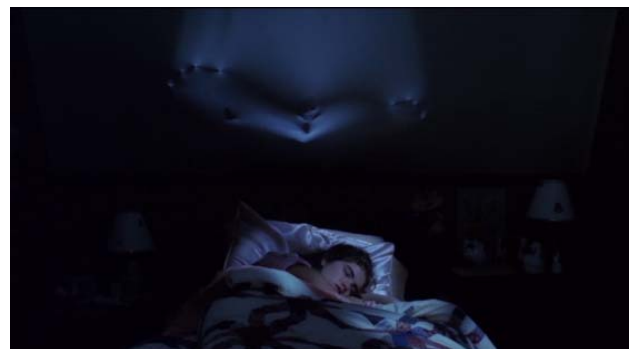
Nancy, daughter of the police officer who arrested Freddy, dreams she is stalked through a grimy boiler room and just as he catches her



she awakens to find four razor cuts on her night-dress.

Nancy talks to her friends and her story spooks them as they have been having the same dream. Since they are all feeling uneasy and their parents react strangely when the subject is broached, Tina, Nancy and her boyfriend Glen Lantz (Johnny Depp) decide to have a sleep-over to make the nervous Tina feel better. Rod Lane, Tina's teen rebel boyfriend crashes the sleepover and takes Tina to bed. Bad move, sex in a slasher movie only means one thing! Tina has another nightmare, this time the killer catches her and slaughters her. Rod wakes up to find Tina being cut open by invisible knives and then dragged up the wall and splattered across the ceiling. Obviously since Rod is the only other person in the room he is going to be the main suspect, so he high-tails it out of there.

Nancy continues to have nightmares about Freddy to the horror of her mother who turns to the bottle. When Rod is strangled in jail with his bed sheets Nancy becomes convinced Freddy is taking his revenge. Nancy does everything she can to stay awake, so her mother takes her to a sleep clinic. This time she manages to bring something back from her nightmare - Freddy's hat. Under pressure, Nancy's mother, rather



drunk, spills the beans and tells Nancy about Freddy and even shows Nancy Freddy's glove which she has kept hidden in a furnace. (Who would keep a glove of someone they killed? Really, a memento? Anyway...) It doesn't set Nancy's mind at ease one bit!

Nancy devises a plan to catch Freddy but Glen falls asleep and is reduced to a load of blood, guts and bone. Nancy then tries to trap Freddy but instead he kills her mother and she is left to face him on her own. The film ends as with many of the Freddy films to come, with a link to sequels. Nancy finds herself in a car with all her friends and then realises she is still in a dream state. Freddy drives away with Nancy.

The first Elm Street really broke the rather stale state of slasher films. It created a witty, intelligent and wisecracking killer, who while brutal and monstrous was also entertaining. This sense of contradiction matched with great suspense, buckets of gore and interesting twists in the plot made this an instant cult film success story.

The strange supernatural dream storyline was very different from the traditional "nutter with a knife" style killer and Robert Englund as Freddy was a superb choice. He certainly would not have been aware how typecast he would be from then on!! The acting was excellent even starring Johnny Depp in his very first movie role.

Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge

Wes Craven left after the first film and in the second film (which dates from 1985) Jack Sholder takes over the reins. It is certainly a strange film; the basic plot is that dear old Freddy spends the entire film trying to get into a teenage boys body!

Poor Jesse; his family could have chosen any house in Springwood, but they have purchased



that house on Elm Street.

For some reason Jesse finds himself having recurring intense dreams about a badly burnt man in a dirty red and green sweater, with knives on the fingers of his right hand. He wakes up sweaty and

disoriented and seems to spend a lot of his time shirtless and without pants. As has been noted by many other critics of the film, this continues at school, at the gym and at the locker room. He is constantly degraded by the school sports coach who is obviously gay.

Lisa, a friend of Jesse, finds the diary of Nancy (from the first film) which describes the Freddy story. That night Jesse has a very strange dream, especially for a straight boy ! He dreams he is in a gay bar where he meets his school coach clad in leather ! The coach takes Jesse back to the empty school where he makes Jesse run laps and then strip and take a shower while he watches. If this is not obvious enough. Freddy takes control to protect his "boy" and attacks the coach by invisibly throwing balls, balls, balls and more balls, at the coach. He then ties him up in the shower, strips him naked and whips him – all while the naked Jesse watches from the shower. Wow !

Of course Jesse soon finds out it was not all a dream and that his coach is really dead. He goes to Lisa's party and has a freakout. He can't deal with the fact that Lisa has "come onto him"



Sweaty Jesse



Straight Jesse dreams of his coach in a gay bar !

and runs away to a male friend's place. He asks his friend if he can spend the night as "someone is trying to get inside my body", his friend replies "Yeah, and she's female and waiting for you in the cabana, and you want to sleep with me." Then tells his friend "If anything starts to happen or I start to act weird... You've got to stop me." Umm, right. His friend forgets Jesse's request and falls asleep; a fatal mistake.

Freddy now has a solid hold on Jesse and in his body goes to Lisa's house where a pool party is in full swing. While Lisa is able to fight off Freddy, the partygoers panic and run for the fence, only to be confronted by scorching hot metal. Freddy has them cornered against the back fence and exclaims, "You are all my children now!" Lisa's father takes aim at Jesse/Freddy with a rifle but Lisa saves him and he vanishes.

Lisa runs to the old factory where Freddy worked and tries to get Jesse to fight against Freddy. When this doesn't work, she kisses Freddy, who recoils in horror (as you do) and Jesse crawls out of Freddy's ashes.

The following day, Jesse goes back to school, thinking all has returned to normal. As the bus drives off, it begins to travel faster and faster and misses all its stops. Freddy's glove bursts through their friend's chest and the bus speeds off the main road and into the open land, just like in Jesse's nightmares and in preparation for another sequel.

Generally while *Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* has some very entertaining themes, it is not considered the highlight of the series.

Most Freddy fans feel that the best sequel was

to come in Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors.

Nightmare on Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors.

"...The film's dream sequences are ingenious, and they feature some remarkable nightmare images..."

Janet Maslin, New York Times

The third installment of the Elm Street franchise is actually considered one of the very best and was released in 1987. It was directed by Chuck Russell and starred Robert Englund, Patricia Arquette, Heather Langenkamp, and Craig Wasson. *Dream Warriors* continues one year after the events of *Nightmare 2*.

It is focused on seven teenagers (Kristen, Joey, Taryn, Kincaid, Phillip, Jennifer and Will) in a sleep clinic who have constant nightmares about Freddy. Each character is well developed and *Dream Warriors* really makes you care about each character and come to understand their quirks and problems.

The treatments offered for their myriad disorders do no good as the psychiatrist believes they are suffering from delusional thinking. But when Nancy Thompson, a survivor of Freddy's earlier rampage, joins the staff things begin to change. Nancy wants to use a new untested drug which inhibits dreaming but the doctors at the clinic won't allow her to go ahead. Soon Freddy has his way and one teen is dispatched after another with some truly astounding dream sequences along the way.

There are some highly innovative scenes including Taryn being killed by injecting her with a massive amount of heroin from his claws, and Will slaughtered by his wheelchair growing spikes and attacking him. Gender bending is also again on the cards as Joey is kidnapped by Freddy who seduces him in the form of a sexy nurse!



Dream Warriors also expands the concept of Freddy as a supernatural being. Nancy wonders why Freddy is so much stronger than he once was. He explains "*the souls of the children give me strength.*" It seems that the dead Freddy does not simply kill his victims but holds their soul's captive using their energy to keep himself existing between this world and the next. The crux of *Dream Warriors* is the art of lucid dreaming. Kristen is not only able to wake up inside her dreams but can also call others to join her. Soon she will realise this is the key to destroying Freddy.

An interesting further development in *Dream Warriors* is the appearance of Freddy's mother, now Sister Mary Helena, and the presentation of further information on Freddy's past.

The theme song of the movie, *Dream Warriors*, was written and performed by the heavy metal band Dokken. The success of the single led to all the following sequels including a heavy metal song in their soundtracks, Freddy was now firmly an anti-hero! In the U.S *Dream Warriors* grossed \$44.8 million, making it the third highest grossing Elm Street movie in the franchise.



A Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master

"You shouldn't have buried me, I'm not dead"

The Dream Master dates from 1998 and was directed by Renny Harlin. It is directly linked to Elm Street 3 and really continues the plot straight from it. It seems Freddy was not buried in consecrated ground and hence he is able to come back into this world once again and continue his reign of terror. There is quite a bit of humour in this one. For example, Freddy returns after Kincaid dreams he is in the Springwood junkyard, where his dog Jason (Obvious an inside horror joke !) urinates fire on Freddy's grave and Freddy returns.

The film starts as the remaining Elm Street kids; Kristen (now played by Tuesday Knight instead of Patricia Arquette), Joey and Kincaid have been released from the clinic and are living normal lives. However, slowly it begins to dawn on them that something is wrong and soon they are once again confronted with the fact that Freddy is back. This time Freddy is after all the remaining descendants of the Elm Street parents.

After Kristen shares her special ability with Alice, Alice makes a frightening discovery; Freddy



Poor Joey: Freddy takes the form of a woman again !

is somehow using their special dream powers to bring a new generation of Elm Street kids under his sway. Since the world of dreams proved so popular in The Dream Warriors, it is expanded in The Dream Master. Each of the major characters have special dream abilities which Alice is able to call upon when she has to face Freddy. It must be said that Freddy looks amazing in The Dream Master, better than in any film before.

Once again the film took the special effects to the edge and created some images which were better than anything that had gone before. Many argued that Harlin placed too much emphasis on the special effects and gave the film a comic book style, but at the box office it did well. It opened in 1,765 theaters across the US with the gross of the movie being \$49.3 million, the second highest Nightmare in the seven films of the series.

The dialogue and plot is a bit thin, but it has a certain fast paced horror pizzazz which makes it an interesting sequel, better than most sequels and certainly superior to those that came next.

A Nightmare on Elm Street 5: The Dream Child

The Dream Child dates from 1989 and is directed by Stephen Hopkins. Authors Stephen King and Frank Miller were offered the job of writing and directing this movie, but both wisely knocked the job back. New Line were certainly churning out the sequels by now and to avoid being formulaic they needed to look for new story twists, so Freddy's mother becomes more significant in this one. It still doesn't really offer much in the way of a new direction for the franchise.



The focus is on Alice, who having survived the previous film, finds Freddy is not only haunting her dreams but stalking her through the mind of her unborn child. It seems Freddy is sick of being just a dream psycho killer and wants to return to the world of the living. So Freddy's mother now must step in to save the day.

The Dream Child is unusual in the Elm Street series; Freddy has lost a lot of his powers since the last film and hence doesn't look (or sound) as sparkly. At the same time the film has far more dialogue, and drama than earlier films. It even attempts to handle such social issues as teen pregnancy and abortion.

This makes it a rather weird sort of horror film. A lot of the storyline is recycled from earlier films and the body count is only three ! It must be said, however, that these murders were pretty gruesome in the unrated released, and for cinema release they were cut down quite a bit.

The special effects are far less successful than those in any of the other films.

Not an impressive sequel to say the least. It was the lowest grossing film of



A Nightmare on Elm Street 6 Freddy's Dead: The Final Nightmare

Elm Street 6 was marketed as Freddy's Dead: The Final Nightmare, released in 1991 and directed by Rachel Talalay. It was certainly a celebrity affair with cameo appearances by Johnny Depp, Roseanne Barr, Tom Arnold and Alice Cooper with Iggy Pop singing the movie's title song. It was originally presented in many theatres in 3D and many DVD releases included both a 2D and 3D version with 3D glasses.

To add a fresh approach to the story, and they certainly needed it since Freddy had killed nearly all the kids in Springwood, they introduce





a new character. Yes, it seems, somehow it had slipped the memory of all the characters in the first five films that Freddy has a child. Of course, she will be the centre of this new battle.

Freddy is locked in Springwood. The town of is completely childless after mass teen suicides and unsolved child killings. Springwood's limits form a barrier he cannot cross, so he focuses all his energy on the last teen left, John Doe. Doe finds himself confronted by Freddy in a dream and is pushed past the town limits by Freddy. As John exits the barrier he hits his head on a rock and does not remember who he is or where he is.

Picked up by the police confused and disoriented Doe is taken to a shelter where he is put under the care of Dr. Maggie Burroughs. In an attempt to trigger his memory she decides to take John to Springwood as she has found a newspaper article in his pocket relating to a missing woman named Krueger. Unbeknown to Maggie and John, three other residents have stowed away in the back of the vehicle, and they all head to Springwood where the fun will begin.

Springwood is a strange place filled with nutters and loonies. John cannot understand why Freddy hasn't killed him, so when Maggie and John realize Freddy had a kid John makes the obvious assumption. They also assume that since Freddy's child was removed from him by child services he became an out-of-control psychopathic child killer. Certainly an interesting observation, taking a child away turns someone into a mad insane dream-invading mass murderer!

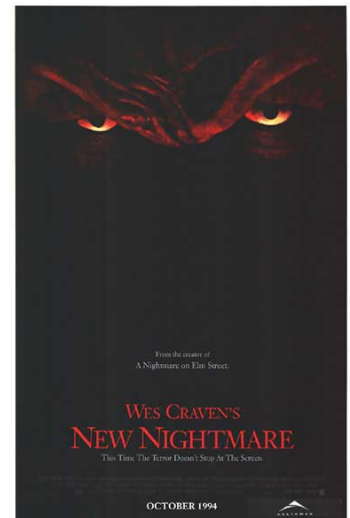
The story twists and turns as we see the slaughter of the stowaways, come to realize that John

is not Freddy's son but a pawn in a greater game and poor old Maggie gets possessed by Freddy. Soon Freddy smashes the town's barrier but before he can spread his web to new counties, he finds an adversary he did not expect. He attempts to recruit the aid of his daughter, however, she isn't too impressed with her demonic dad and they meet head to head.

As a sequel this was hopefully an end to the Freddy saga - while the first three films explored new territory, the others tended to rehash the same ground. The last film, while entertaining, offered little that was new and relied a lot on the gimmick of 3D. This may have been fun in a theatre but knives coming at you in three dimensions do not make up for a lack of good story. The acting is reasonable, the characters intriguing but it is pretty tired by now. It did do very well at the box office since everyone wanted to see the conclusion to the series, it is just a bit sad it couldn't have gone out with a better bang.

Wes Craven's New Nightmare

In 1994 Wes Craven decided to return to the Elm Street series and it is surprising how well this new approach worked. Craven wanted make a different sort of Freddy film which was darker, grittier and more realistic.



He decided to structure the film as separate from what had gone before and so it is not considered part of the Elm Street series. The plot centres around the making of an Elm Street film with Freddy using the film as a way to egress into the physical world. It is far more intelligent than the previous films and certainly avoids the comic book teen approach found in films four to six. Freddy is far more visceral, his makeup and glove have been redesigned to make him far more threatening and in the end he looks far more like what one would expect a serial child killer to look.



It is ten years since the first Elm Street film and Heather is living happily with her husband, Chase, and her son, Dylan. But her life suddenly changes when she finds herself being stalked by someone who sounds like Freddy from the films she once starred in. Chase has just been killed in a car accident after he accidentally fell asleep behind the wheel but there are questionable blade marks in his body. Dylan refuses to sleep as he is having nightmares about a strange man and New Line Cinema have just started to make a new Freddy film.

The crew working on a mechanical glove for a new movie have been killed and calls to Robert Englund and Wes Craven reveal something is very wrong. It seems Freddy was not just a part of Craven's imagination but is actually an ancient demon and is trying again to break into the world of the living.

The way in which the film intersects the making of a film with "reality" is highly successful and it seems Craven liked this approach so much it used it as the basis of the *Scream* series.

Of all the Elm Street films since *Dream Warriors*, this received the best reviews, sadly this was not reflected at the box office. It seems most viewers wanted the more comic book approach to Freddy and were not comfortable with the realism which Craven injected into the mythology. By now Freddy had become a "urban



legend" in his own right and to try and modify it was box office suicide, the fans had claimed Freddy and he was now public property.

Freddy vs. Jason

It is 2003 and the battle of the supervillains hits the big screen. Directed by Ronny Yu it is entertaining enough but only if you set your expectations pretty low. It is fun to bring together two of the most celebrated Eighties slasher icons and it certainly packs in the action but to be honest it is a fairly lame concept. The idea was to tie together both franchises after the final films in both series *Freddy's Dead: The Final Nightmare* and *Jason Goes to Hell: The Final Friday*. It may have made commercial sense but it displays a total lack of innovation or creativity.

Freddy is trapped in Hell as the parents of Springwood manage to erase all evidence of his existence by feeding their kids a dream suppressant. This really pisses Freddy off so he decides to enlist the soul of the favourite Camp Crystal Lake killer, Jason Voorhees. Since Freddy never seems able to stay out of drag, he appears as Jason's mother and sends him off to terrorise Springwood. But since you can



never trust a serial killer to know the boundaries, Jason just keeps killing. So Freddy must somehow get Jason knocked out so he can battle him to the death in the dream world. At the same time a group of teens decides to join the battle on Jason's side and bring him back home to Crystal Lake.

It is fair to say it is pretty bloody, filled with good one-liners from Freddy and a bit like a match between your favourite football teams. It does have a certain charm and the climactic battle is rather fun, and above all it doesn't take itself too seriously.

A Nightmare on Elm Street (2010)

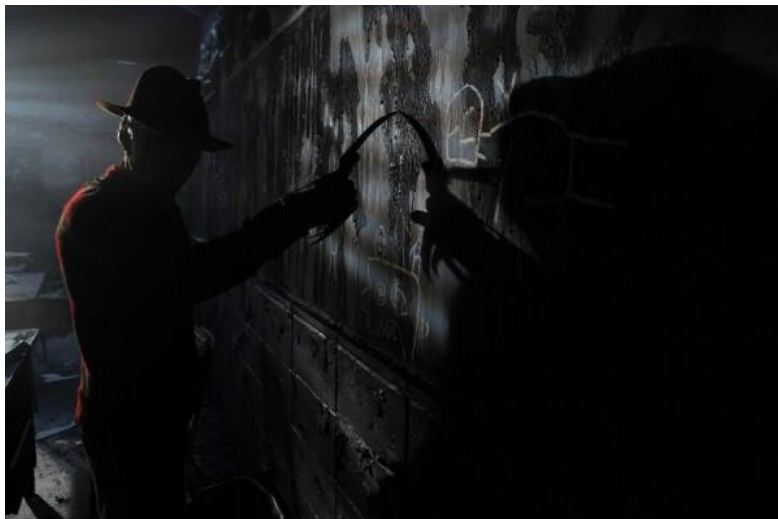
It seems Hollywood just loves remakes. While there are lots of new innovative horror films especially in the Indie and World Cinema fields, Hollywood seems locked into the true and tried models of old villains remade time and time again.

There have been some success stories such as Rob Zombies adaptation of Halloween which was certainly harrowing and far more confronting than anyone expected, but most remakes are fairly disappointing.

The new adaptation of Nightmare on Elm Street is slated for a 2010 release. It has been written by Eric Heisserer and Wesley Strick, directed by Samuel Bayer, and produced by Michael Bay, Andrew Form, and Brad Fuller.

The film stars Jackie Earle Haley as Freddy Krueger (I presume Robert Englund was more than sick of the role), while Rooney Mara takes

[Jackie Earle Haley as Freddy](#)



over the role of Nancy Thompson. Kyle Gallner will play Nancy's boyfriend Nancy's boyfriend Quentin, Thomas Dekker as Jesse and Kellan Lutz as Dean, both sports jock roles as well as Katie Cassidy, Connie Britton and Clancy Brown.

Bayer's idea for the new Elm Street is interesting. He wants to do away with the wisecracking comedic Freddy and replace him with a short, menacing and vicious murderer. This will certainly divide the fans (who are already debating Robert Englund vs Jackie Earle Haley as Freddy) but may actually offer something new to a franchise which has been dead in the water for more than a while. At the same time the "Michael Bay" remake machine, as it is known, is not especially well respected and having seen what he did to Friday 13th fans are not holding their collective breath.

According to Variety and various other news sources the approach is to make the film far darker than the original and explore the story of Freddy Krueger as a real horror tale. It has been noted that with the development of CGI the new film will be able to explore the dream worlds far more extensively than was possible in the original films.

Freddy, it seems, is not quite dead yet and it will be interesting to see where he goes with a new generation taking over the mantle for his legend.

The two new Freddy images come from the San Diego Comic Convention.



Vampire superstition goes back at least as far as the ancient Persians, who depicted on a vase a man struggling with a huge creature that was trying to bite him. King Vikramaditya of early Indian legend tried to capture a *vitala*, a corpse-inhabiting ghoul. Early vampires were often described as bloated and of ruddy complexion, quite unlike the later versions. Vampire legends were quite common under a variety of names, especially in Eastern Europe where an uneducated peasant class would readily believe in superstitions.

The stories of the “undead” may have started among superstitious people when, under some circumstances like extreme cold in a crypt or use of alcohol-based perfumes to dress the body, a corpse was found to have suffered little from decomposition.

Hair and nails continue to grow for some time after death, which also encouraged the “living dead” myth, but the fangs seem to be an original idea of later writers in the 19th century. The idea that exposure to daylight could kill a vampire



Lilith as Vampire

was possibly from rapid decomposition effects after a corpse was disturbed and brought out of its coffin or crypt into the daylight and fresh air for examination.

The legend that a vampire could only be killed by a wooden stake through the heart goes back to the

very early superstitions. I have been unable to track down the legend that they slept in their coffin during the day, but this too is probably from early times.

The inability of a vampire to reflect in a mirror or cast a shadow in some cultures

was put down to the vampire’s lack of a soul, so it appears that the churches were familiar with them as well. As usual they simply hijacked the established legend and put their own spin on it. Hence also the idea that vampires could be repelled by a cross or injured by holy water. Vampires’ dislike of garlic, however, is a fairly recent legend from Rumania.

About the only consistent feature was the vampire’s need to suck “life essence” (or blood).

Bram Stoker’s 1897 novel *Dracula* dramatised the legends but it was not the first. That honour goes to John Polydori’s book *The Vampire* as far back as 1819. *Dracula* served to set the picture of the more conventional vampire – wealthy, menacing and reclusive. Stoker’s book may owe some of its details to superstitions about Vlad Tepes, “Vlad the Impaler”, a historical figure whose reign of terror involved more than a little blood.



Bob Estreich, Gerwood Stewart, & Robert Black



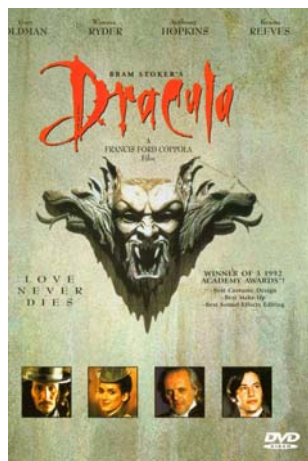
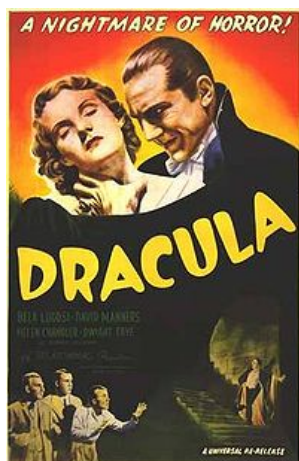
Classic scene from *Nosferatu*

Elizabeth Bathory, another historical figure, had such bloodthirsty habits as bathing in the blood of female virgins, believing it would help her keep her youthful looks. From the pictures of her, it may have worked, but it was a bit rough on the virgins.

Vampires in film began with Murnau's *Nosferatu* in 1922, based on Stoker's story. This silent classic has recently been pieced together from remnants and reissued by Kino (a review appeared in an earlier Synergy). Incidentally Murnau's vampire has a reflection in a mirror.



In 1931 Director Tod Browning released what is arguably the best of all vampire films, starring Bela Lugosi as *Dracula*. So good was this film that Francis Ford Coppola remade *Dracula* in 1992 and used many of the dramatic devices from the sixty-year-old film.



In the 1950s the vampire story was revived by Hammer Studios in Britain. They produced a whole genre of "Hammer Horror" featuring many traditional characters like werewolves and vampires. Hammer Studios played a pivotal role in the creation of the "modern" image of the vampire on screen. It began in 1958 with *Dracula*, which was directed by Terence Fisher, and starred Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee. Although Cushing did not have quite the same screen presence as Bela Lugosi, he turned in a top performance. Both went on to star in many of the following Hammer films.



The Legend of the Seven Golden Vampires

The studio spent over a decade making vampire films and produced a surprisingly diverse range of fare. *The Legend of the Seven Golden Vampires* was a little different from the run-of-the-mill stories, though – it featured martial arts and was made in conjunction with the Shaw Bros from Hong Kong.

While Hammer films are generally remembered for their cheesy sets and low budgets, most people do not realize that it was Hammer that actually created a large number of the Vampire conventions that are still followed today.

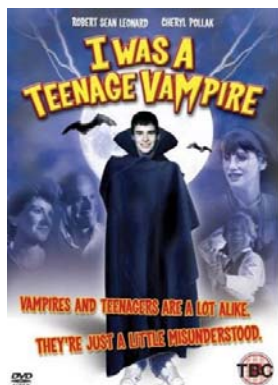
Hammer was also the first to really cement the idea of the vampire's antithesis, the vampire hunter. In earlier films the slayers were less than competent, but in Hammer we had the first true adversary to the vampire, the glorious and righteous Van Helsing played so well by Peter Cushing.

In *Vampire Circus* and *Kiss of Evil*, Hammer offered us the first portrayal of vampires as having a unique form of society, while In *Lust for a Vampire*, they offered the first loving relationship between a vampire and a human. Many of these conventions that were first explored in Hammer films form the basis for such modern films as *Van Helsing*, *Blade*, *Buffy* and *Twilight*.

Hammer also explored eroticism in vampire films before anyone else, with bare breasts, lesbianism and even hints of incest and other forbidden acts of love. Today we may look back at Hammer vampire films with some level of jest, yet when considered in the context of the time period they were groundbreaking and helped form the foundation of the legend of the vampire in film.

In the late 1940s through to the 1970s horror actor Lon Chaney appeared in a number of U.S. Dracula films. Most were quickie products not unlike the Hammer films, but lacked a little of the talent and professional edge. They have mostly dropped into obscurity now but at the time they kept the genre alive in the U.S. in a fairly basic form.

The comic approach was taken in the U.S. with films like *So-and-so Meets The Vampire* (cheapie films starring fading movie comedy groups), *My Best Friend Is A Vampire* (1988) and the equally silly *I Was A Teenage Vampire* (1988) (both cheap knockoffs aimed at the teenage drive-in theatre market). After this it seemed that every director had a zombie movie in him, and vampires almost dropped from the scene. There were final passing swipes at the genre by Mel Brooks in *Dracula: Dead and Loving It*, starring Leslie Nielsen, in 1995, and by Wes Craven in *Vampire in Brooklyn* (1995, starring Eddie Murphy).



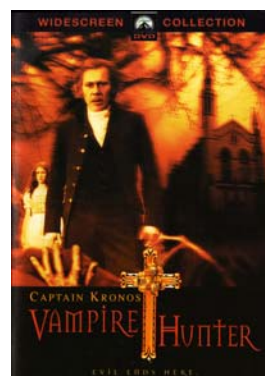
The genre survived but gradually split into a number of versions. There was the scientifically based version begun by Matheson's book *I Am Legend* in 1954 which reached its peak in the BBC Channel 4 TV series *Ultraviolet* in 1998. The BBC modernised vampires somewhat like Matheson's book, giving them a certain scientific backing by showing their need for blood as a medical condition. The vampires were aware that their food source now had the power to destroy itself and they must take control. As



usual they were hunted down and exterminated ruthlessly by a secret government agency, but the twist in this series is from the vampires themselves – they have learned to deal with their condition without killing the victim. They have integrated well, if surreptitiously, into society and could now ask “if Jack can’t tell the difference and you can’t tell the difference, are we really that different?”

The word vampire was not mentioned in the series – they were called “Code V” and “leeches” to avoid the Gothic rut that vampire stories had become stuck in. The series was brilliantly written, credible and well acted in the best British traditions. It has become a cult show and is still available on DVD. A pilot was made for a U.S. version but thankfully it never went into production.

The vampire hunter seemed to be always lurking in the background with occasional films like Hammer's very ordinary *Captain Kronos, Vampire Hunter*. It introduced the idea that there are many different species of vampire. The one in this film drained the “youth essence”, not the blood, and was therefore perhaps a little closer to the legendary vampire. Victims aged quickly rather than dying. The film also featured a hilarious scene where a nubile maiden is attacked by a very obviously stuffed fruit bat.



Sometimes a really good filmmaker can take a worn-out genre and do something amazing with it. “What if the blonde girl from all those horror movies goes down the dark alley and as the big bad monster comes to get her, she turns around and kicks its ass?” Joss Whedon wrote a script based on this simple idea of role reversal. Thus was *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* born.



Buffy had all the stereotypes for the naive young victim of those films. She was blonde, popular, something of a modern airhead and a cheerleader. This by no means hurt the film's appeal. Guys got to watch as the cheerleader flipped around screen showing off quite nicely and for the girls the hero was well and truly one of their own. Buffy was not the tough assistant female hero to the guy - she was the lead, she had the moves, the attitude and the cool lines that would show themselves as something of a Whedon trademark throughout his later projects (Buffy the TV series, Firefly, Serenity)



The film was quite popular but definitely carried a strong late eighties flavour to it. It still had the vampire attributes of that era, but it featured some very good actors like Donald Sutherland and Rutger Hauer. This gave it a credibility that led to the development of a TV series. It added several new ideas to the Vampire genre; first and most obvious was the idea of the Vampire Slayer, the mystical warrior born to oppose them (unlike van Helsing, who just got given the job). The next was the idea of a Watcher, someone who guided and trained the Slayer. Similarly the importance of crosses was reduced in the movie, although most likely this impression was given in the sassy lines in the final showdown.

Buffy also maintained much of the general 'legend' of vampires, including entering a building only with permission and the ability to fly.

Five years later in 1997 Buffy was resurrected (the pun is deliberate) as a TV series. Some of the fans of the original movie were hesitant about this new incarnation, viewing it primarily as a cheap rip-off of the original. At least that

was the case until it actually aired.

Buffy the series proved to be an enormous success. It was redressed for the nineties and aimed squarely at teenagers. The series lasted for seven seasons, created the Angel spin off and five video games as well as an animated series and its own magazine. With its longevity, the series had time to develop a large set of lore around not only Vampires but also witches, demons, werewolves and all sorts of other fairy-tale and nightmare creatures. It even at one point took a stroll into Mary Shelley's backyard.

Buffy exploited all the traditional weaknesses of Vampires including sunlight, beheading, stakes, garlic (not very prominent), crosses and holy water. It maintained various other elements of the vampire genre such as super strength, swapping of blood to create a vampire (not just feeding or a bite such as with werewolves) and immortality (kind of boring without that one) and lust for blood (hard to leave out).

In addition the series added extra elements. Some were simply necessary for story telling such as the vampire's face morphing when they took on their vampire form. Films have varied in this point over the years. All tend to have vampires with the elongated canines. In some cases the teeth grow as needed but in others they are permanent.

The series developed the idea of vampires having no soul, although this is not an original idea. This was used as an element to explain the purely lust based drive of the vampires. They had no soul therefore no conscience, no guilt. This in effect tipped





The Team from *Angel*

their balance towards committing all the sins we crave with nothing to help them resist. In most vampire films drinking blood is similar to an addict getting a fix. Whether they can survive without it or not the vampire deeply desires it.

The series also used concepts such as the word 'sire' to show respect to a vampire's creator (the vampire that turned it). This also shows the reason for the fear of the vampire - an immensely powerful and evil entity that appears outwardly human but is always the subduer of its victims, manipulative, lustful and emotionally powerful. This is in general contrast with werewolves which tend to represent the savage and out of control elements of a person and in a number of the movies and series this is how the two have been presented. Buffy never really deviated from these norms of the two genres.

One advantage the Buffy series had over films was its length. The TV series lasted for seven years, 156 episodes (I think). As a result it was able to develop very deep back stories and more intricate lore around not only vampires but also around the entire world of demons and witchcraft that became a part of it. Always Buffy was the Vampire Slayer and even up to the end of the series vampires played a very significant part in the show but just as often the main character and the posse of characters around her were slaying other demons or defeating other enemies.

Within its time the series explored the beginnings of vampires in general, postulating that the earth was once covered in demons who

ruled over it. At some point they left and as the last demon was leaving it, the demon bit a human, passing on some of its essence. In this way vampires are an ancient, but bastard race born of something truly powerful. The Buffy TV series added significantly to showing vampires as more complex than the monster in the night (though this has always been an element of the vampire). Throughout *Buffy* and *Angel* (a spinoff series about a vampire with a soul) there were several vampires who fought 'on the side of good'.

Buffy, *Angel* and films from around the same era have enabled a new role for the once traditional monster we call vampire. In these works they take on the role of hero.

Joss Whedon introduced the world to his version of Vampires and gave them back an eternal enemy, a reason to fear. The TV series received Emmy and Golden Globe award nominations.

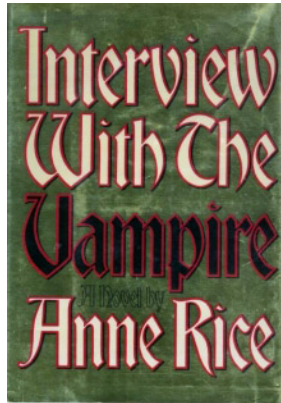
The vampire hunter genre received another boost from New Line Cinema's Blade trilogy in the late 1990s and early 2000s starring Wesley Snipes' rippling muscles. The series was based on a Marvel Comics character and appealed to a large number of viewers. Although the Blade films were darker than Buffy and more action-based they kept to the traditional evil vampire style. Blade was himself part vampire and although the films were mostly action-



Wesley Snipes as Blade

oriented the vampire element was important.

The conflict between a vampire subculture and a part-vampire was, to say the least, an interesting concept. There is also a rather interesting "human" vampire genre, typified by Ann Rice's 1976 novel *Interview With The Vampire* and a number of sequels. Anne Rice could generally be credited with have the most profound effect on the romanticisation of the vampire. Her books deal with creatures that are doleful and intricate, age old creatures that are effectively lonely and out of touch.



In *Interview With The Vampire* Louis, a comparatively young vampire (only 200 years old), tells a reporter of his conversion by the vampire Lestat. He discusses his initial disgust at feeding from humans, but he gradually becomes accustomed to it. What he will not accept is Lestat's complete lack of compassion for his victims, and Louis plans to leave Lestat.

One night he feeds off a plague victim, and Lestat converts the woman's near-dead daughter into a vampire – a sort of daughter for Louis. This forces Louis to stay with him. As the girl Claudia matures (in her mind – her body is still the little girl she was when Lestat converted her) she realizes she can never really grow up and comes to hate Lestat.



Louise and Lestat from *Interview With a Vampire*



Claudia from *Interview With The Vampire*

She and Louis hatch a plot to kill Lestat and then go to Europe. Lestat turns up again in Europe. He kills Claudia and Madeline, a girl Louis has converted as a companion and a mother figure for Claudia. Despondent, Louis returns to America, where he tells the reporter of his disillusionment at being immortal and his weariness at all the pain he has witnessed and caused.

In 1994 a film of the book was released by Paramount and became a success in spite of its dark subject. Sequels in the series such as *Queen of the Damned* sadly were not up to expectation.



Not all vampires were male. Lilith, a mythological Hebrew figure, goes back as far as Adam – some beliefs have her as Adam's first wife and Eve as his second. Her specialty was seducing men who would father more of her kind.

From 1919 female vampires turned up occasionally in film, usually in an erotic context. However from the late Sixties onwards a new genre arose featuring eroticism, sex and lesbian themes.

One of the founders of this genre is seen as Jess Franco whose *Vampiros Lesbos* (1971) caused dismay in the community at large as it mixed sex, horror and psychedelia into a strange yet cinematically beautiful mix. Starring the stunning Soledad Miranda it was a startling film marked by impressive visuals and a great score.



Jess Franco's *Vampiros Lesbos* (1971)

The film is noted for its strange dreamlike quality which Franco has continued in the wide range of sex and horror films which he has continued to produce to this day.

Another significant filmmaker in the field is Jean Rollins whose vampire eroticism includes *The Nude Vampire* (1970), *The Shiver Of The Vampires* (1970) and *Requiem For A The Vampire* (1971). His films range from softcore vampire horror to hardcore cult sex films. Many of his films are unknown outside France, however, Redemptions Films (UK and USA) are doing a great job releasing his titles, many for the very first time. (<http://www.redemption-films.com>)

A recent release, for example, is *Dracula's Fiancée* - *La Fiancée de Dracula* (Redemption Films 2009) which Rollin made in 2002 and is a superb gothic erotic horror with chain smoking nuns, baby eating Ogresses, dwarf jesters and of course, a hunt for Count Dracula ! All presented in high definition taken directly from the master tapes of the film!



A classic example of the genre is the *French Female Vampire* or *The Bare Breasted Countess* (1973) which featured a woman who needed life essence to stay young forever – the Elizabeth Bathory legend. This usually required the performing of oral sex on her male and female victims followed by a surprise bite at the critical moment.

The original running time of around 100 minutes varied as the film was cut and released under different names to reinforce either the horror or the sexual theme.



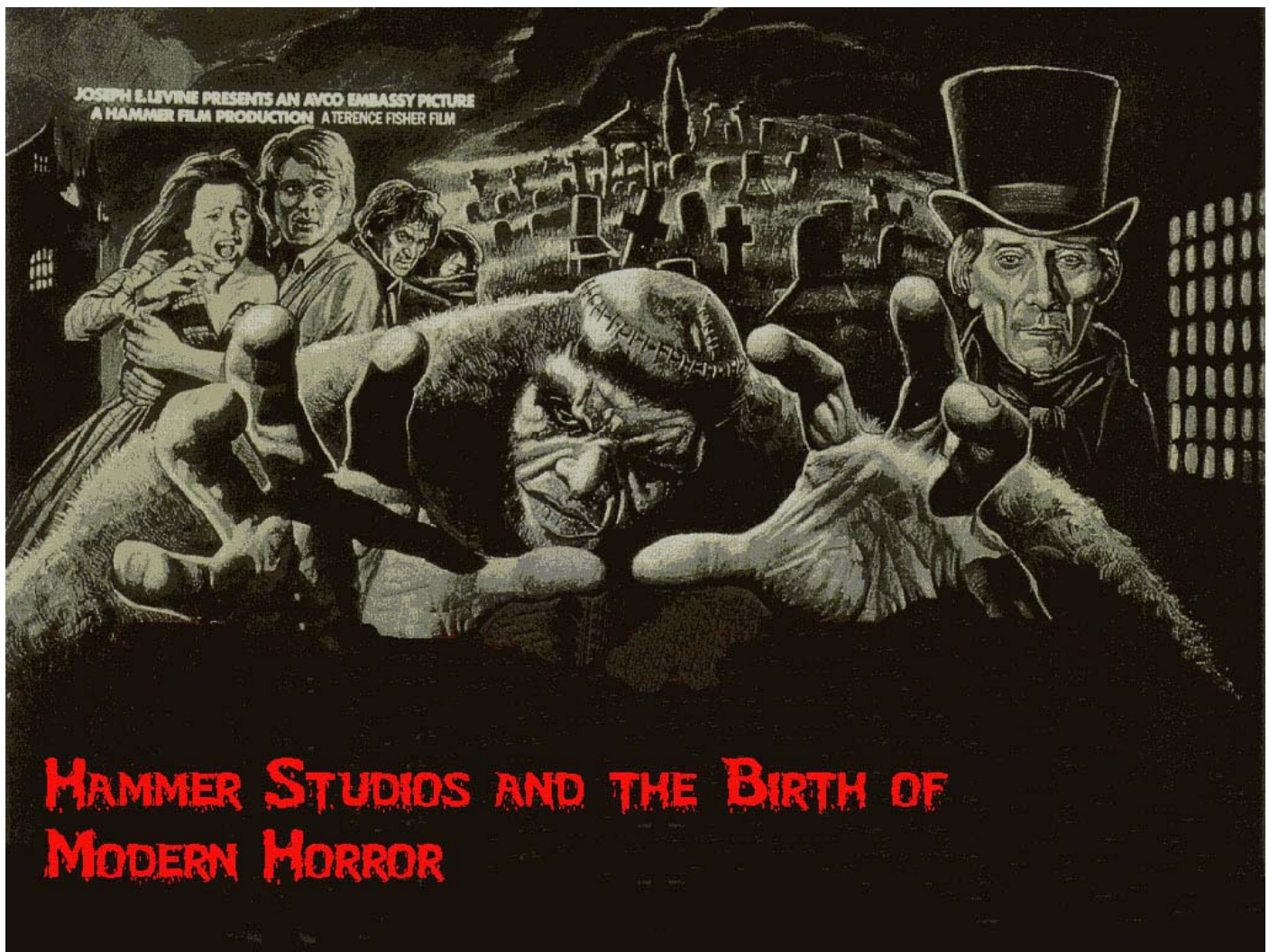
The French Female Vampire or The Bare Breasted Countess

Usually the female vampire role was as a consort for the head (male) vampire and few women got to play major roles. They had their own conventions, though – invariably attractive, low cut dresses, often a very violent nature, and fiercely protective of their lord. They also seemed to die fairly quickly so the plot could get back to the main conflict.

As their role became more important they became harder to kill. Lesbian overtones appeared. Particularly in graphic novels, their sheer eroticism became more powerful as did their fighting abilities. Perhaps the best example is Forrest Ackerman's *Vampirella*, a comic book character for Warren Publishing as far back as 1969. The series was published by them until 1983. Harris Comics then took over and the series continued until 2007. The brilliant and erotic covers were done by famous artists like Frank Frazetta and the content artwork soon became the work of Jose Gonzalez.



Surprisingly the final word on vampires goes to the Japanese. Since around 2000 they have been producing some quite good manga vampire shows, including *Blood: The Last Vampire* which went to fifty episodes. They even did an adaptation of *Interview With The Vampire*. Have vampires finally died or have they just moved further East?



"In my early teens, I went with groups of friends to go see certain films. If we saw the logo of Hammer films we knew it was going to be a very special picture...a surprising experience, usually - and shocking"

Martin Scorsese quoted in The Studio that Dripped Blood.

In 2009 the term "Hammer Horror" brings to mind clichés about horror films; camp overacting, cardboard sets, stereotypical characters, sexy woman, heaving breasts and sexual sub-texts. However, in its day, the Hammer Studio was at the very edge of what was acceptable in film, shocking the critics and battling the British censor. It also created many of the motifs we now find commonplace in horror films.

It is interesting to contemplate how many of the motifs and themes we now find in major horror film releases only came into existence due to the creativity of the writers and actors at Hammer Studios. Hammer was the first to transform the vampire hunter into a true adversary. In earlier films the vampire hunter was a bumbling incompetent only used to show off the majesty of the vampire. In Hammer we had the first true

adversary, the glorious and righteous Van Helsing played so well by Peter Cushing. This nearly equal balance between the hunter and the hunted ratch-



ets up the tension and gives the Hammer vampire films an extra edge. Other motifs include the very first portrayal of Vampires living in a community or society (*Vampire Circus* and *Kiss of Evil*) and in *Lust for a Vampire*, we have one of the first cross-species consensual relationship between a vampire and a human.

Hammer also explored the erotic in a way which caused alarm in many circles. Time and time again Hammer was censured for both violence and sex and battled against a puritan press and the British Censor. Hammer offered bare breasts, nakedness, lesbianism and even hints of incest and other forbidden acts of love.

It is too easy to look at the Hammer films with the eye of the modern horror buff.

Today's horror films are packed with sex and violence and hence we can easily overlook the groundbreaking nature of these early films. At the same time if you make the effort to watch the classic Hammer films there is something quite special about them. The quirky plots, great actors, fascinating characters and unusual motifs and themes still resonate in the dark wells of the imagination. So many of the great horror characters, from Dracula to the Werewolf and Frankenstein, have been given substance by the vision of Hammer so it is worth exploring the history of this fascinating studio.

How did it all begin? The prime mover was Enrique Carreras (1880-1950), who was born in Spain but moved to England to open a chain of cinemas. During the 1920's Carreras combined creativity and high ambition to open two cinemas which were so large they could seat 2000 people. Soon showing films was not enough, and he founded Exclusive films to import and distribute films throughout the U.K. In 1932 Carreras wanted to further expand his empire and actually make films which Exclusive could then distribute. At this stage a new figure enters the picture. William Hinds was a Vaudeville performer, comedian and businessman and together Hinds and Carreras formed Hammer Productions. The name Hammer was taken from Hinds' stage name Will Hammer.

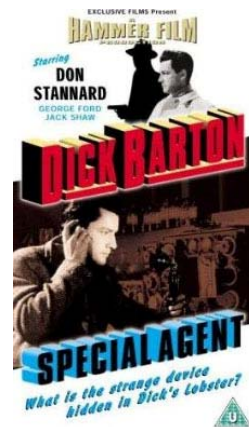
The first Hammer films were certainly not what was to become "quintessential Hammer" - they were fairly average B grade films which distributed well but didn't break any new ground. The first film was *The Public Life of Henry the Ninth* shot at the MGM/ATP studios. This was followed by *The Mystery of the Mary Celeste* which was distributed in the US as *The Phantom Ship* and starred Bela Lugosi. These were followed by *The Song of Freedom* (1936), featuring Paul Robeson, *Sporting Love* (1937) and *The Bank Messenger Mystery* (1936).



The studio expanded with the employment of James Carreras (1909-1990), Enrique's son and Anthony Hinds (1922-), William Hind's son. When war broke out in Europe both sons went off to fight and due to a downturn in the movie industry the company

went into liquidation. Exclusive only survived as a distribution firm.

In 1946, James and Anthony returned to Exclusive, joined by James' son Michael in 1943. They resurrected Hammer, this time as the production arm of Exclusive. At first its primary productions were cheaply-made domestic films designed to support major features. William Hinds re-joined the company and they began work on a range of crime films including *Death in High Heels*, *The Dark Road*, *Crime Reporter* and *Dick Barton Special Agent*. The last film did better than most as it was an adaptation of a popular BBC radio show of the period. Barton played a private investigator and special agent. The series ran to 711 episodes between 1946 and 1951. This was followed by another radio adaptation called *Dr. Morelle - The Case of the Missing Heiress*. It was a mystery thriller featuring Valentine Dyall as Dr. Morelle who investigates the mysterious death of a friend's sister.



Since Hammer was now becoming a reasonably successful production company it was registered as "Hammer Film Productions" on 12th February 1949 with Enrique and James Carreras and William and Tony Hinds as company directors.

Hammer continued to make what could be best defined as detective potboilers; these included *The Man in Black* (1949), *Room to Let* (1949), *Someone at the Door* (1949), *What The Butler Saw* (1950), *The Lady Craved Excitement* (1950), *Black Widow* (1950), *The Rossiter Case* (1950), *To Have and to Hold* (1950), and *The Dark Light* (1950). 1950 was obviously a bumper year for production. This quick production schedule was to be a trademark for Hammer throughout the years; make films quickly, efficiently and in most cases back to back, sometimes using the same sets.

During 1951 Hammer and Exclusive signed a four year production and distribution contract with the American film producer Robert Lippert. This was highly significant for Hammer as it meant their films would now reach the US market and that they would also have unique US content to distribute in the UK. The contract began in 1951 with *The Last Page* and ended with

Women Without Men (aka *Prison Story*, 1955). The last being a women's prison soap opera. Poor Angie is jailed for injuring a man in self defense. She makes an escape bid during a Christmas concert so she can keep a date with her boyfriend. Along the way Angie also helps fellow escapee Marguerite prevent her baby being sent to an orphanage before giving herself up to the authorities.

This arrangement had a number of longer term effects on Hammer Studios which will resonate throughout all future productions. Many of their leads were American due to a clause in the contract and they hired Terence Fisher to direct. Fisher was to play a vital role in later Hammer science fiction and horror films.

In 1953 Hammer created some really quite unusual films including *Four Sided Triangle* and *Spaceways*. These were the first science fiction titles from Hammer and were very different from what had gone before. In *Four Sided Triangle* two scientists are working alone in a barn in an isolated village. Soon they both fall in love with the same girl, Lena who has returned after ten years overseas. Since this is the 1950's she can only have one of them (Robin) and the other, Bill, who is obviously a little disturbed, decides to create a duplicate of her. To do so he must create a machine which is up to the task and after much toil, he succeeds. However disaster strikes when the duplicate also prefers Robin

and Bill and his wretched machine both die in a fire-storm. Combining a soap opera, thwarted love story and warning about the dangers of science it did rather well.

After the success of both *Four Sided Triangle* and *Spaceways*, Hammer looked for more science fiction content. Since adaptations from radio and TV shows had proved a great success, when *The Quatermass Experiment* became available it offered the best of both worlds and the *Quatermass* series of movies began. This resulted in *The Quatermass Xperiment* (1955), *Quatermass II* (1957) and *Quatermass and the Pit* (1967). They also released a film in a similar vein called *X The Unknown* in 1955.



Many film historians actually date the beginning of Hammer horror to *The Quatermass Xperiment* rather than to their first official horror film. These films caused quite some headache for both Hammer and the British Board of Film Censors. While hugely successful with the public, the monsters, violence and horror/fantasy content were not well received by the critics.

The use of the X in *Xperiment* was an especially resourceful marketing twist. In 1951 the X certificate had been introduced as a classification for films suitable for adults only. These were usually marked by exploitation, horror, violence and sex (well, 1950's style). The combination of a science fiction film and quirky marketing worked exceptionally well and this really began Hammers journey to the "dark side".

Let's look at *The Quatermass Xperiment* and *X the Unknown* in a little detail as they are quite significant in Hammer history.

For its time *The Quatermass Xperiment* is actually rather challenging in both content and presentation. It is available on DVD and is still an enjoyable science fiction yarn. A rocket crashes into the countryside and one of the astronauts is killed. The only survivor Victor Carroon, cannot be found. It seems the rocket was part of a special project supervised by the enigmatic Professor Quatermass and he is not impressed that the astronauts are missing.



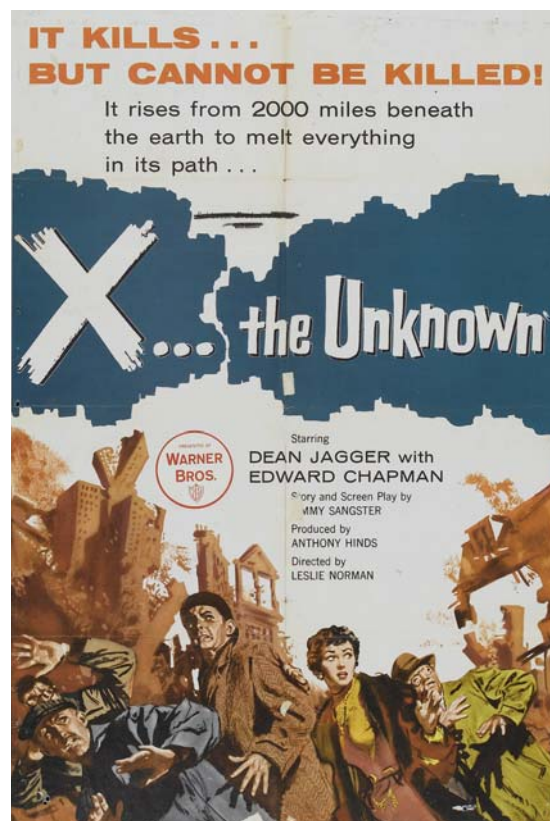


Carroon soon begins to realize something is very wrong. He is harbouring an alien organism that absorbs human flesh and his body begins to transform into some form of strange creature. The police are hot on Carroon's trail as he causes untold damage much to the irritation of Quatermass who is far more interested in the alien organism than Carroon himself. However as Carroon begins to kill and eat animals and humans to feed his transformation, the hunt is on. The final stage of the film is nicely done and reminiscent of the modern trend to mix live handheld footage with standard film. In Westminster Abbey a monster of some sort is on a rampage however as the TV crew begins to transmit live footage, the feed is cut. Lucky for us we can see what is happening and now Quatermass must destroy the alien organism at all costs.

A nice DVD set is the *Quatermass Collection* which includes the three Quatermass films, released in Australia by Roadshow. The original series which inspired the movies is also available, starring John Mills. It was presented in four chapters: Ringstone Round, Lovely Lightning, What Lies Beneath and An Endangered Species. It is available on the 3 DVD Set called *Quatermass* in Australia, distributed by Shock.



X the Unknown dates from 1956 and has much in common with the Quatermass stories. A group of soldiers is on maneuvers in Scotland when they discover a gravel pit which emanates an unusually high amount of radiation. As they



investigate several strange deaths occur and the radioactive material is stolen. It seems that the culprit is not some government agency but, you guessed it, a monster. Dr. Adam Royston takes to the trail of the creature and discovers that these radioactive disturbances occur in a fifty-year cycle and have always been associated with unexplained deaths. He believes that the radioactive material coupled with the recent use of the atomic bomb has awakened the monster. Soon we get to see the terrifying creature, a mud monster of glowing radioactive slime. Here we have the perfect condition of atomic war paranoia, monsters and horror, great stuff Hammer !

It was the success of these films which moved Hammer into the horror field and gave birth to what we now know as the Hammer horror experience.

It all happened in 1957 Hammer realised that success lay in more unusual genres and began looking around for a script. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* was considered a true classic and Universal had made a killing with their 1930 film of the same name. It also helped that the book was in the public domain. At the same time it would not be easy going, as Universal was ready to slap a copyright infringement notice on anything Hammer did which had even the slightest resonance to their 1930's adaptation



of the tale. Sure, Hammer could use the book but nothing, and I mean nothing, could be done which was even remotely similar to the Universal film, not even the makeup.

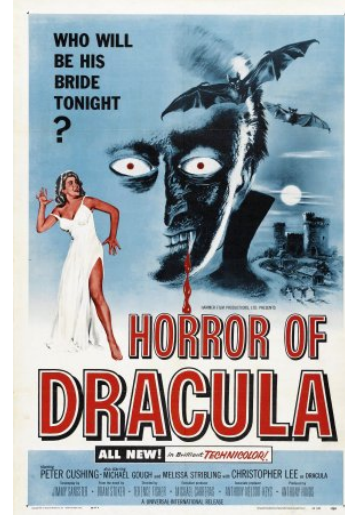
The script was originally written by Max Rosenberg and Milton Subotsky but with fears of Universal's legal action escalating, it was totally rewritten by Jimmy Sangster. A radical approach was taken to the look of the creature. It bears no similarity whatsoever to Boris Karloff's flatheaded bolts-in-the neck creature which had been designed by Jack Pierce. Hammer decided to give Christopher Lee's Frankenstein a face covered in blisters and scars and a dead eye; a look which was far more confronting and grotesque than any Frankenstein shown before on screen. The film hit real problems with the censors - since it was made in colour they believed the horror and violence would cause trauma to those who watched it. Prior to this time no horror film had been made in colour and the bright red blood of the Hammer films really set the standard for later more violent horror fare.

The film went ahead and *The Curse of Frankenstein* an instant success; film critics hated it and

A very new and shocking look for Frankenstein



warned against seeing it. The Tribune called it "Depressing and degrading for anyone who loves the cinema" but the public loved it and it made a fortune, especially for a low budget film which had been created for under 70,000 pounds.



The story was very different from Shelly's original tale, it is far more-action packed and focuses heavily on Baron Frankenstein and his perverse motivations rather than on the creature itself. It also has a strong Fifties social message, echoing the cultural fear of science brought about by the disastrous effects of the atomic bomb. Its success brought Terence Fisher into the fold at Hammer and introduced to the public two actors who would become central to the revival of horror through Hammer Studios, Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee.

Fisher's style was unique; he was able to create A-grade films on a B-grade budget and do so in a record time. He made films back to back and reused backdrops, sets and costumes. This was most obvious with *The Reptile* and *Plague of the Zombies* - watch them one after the other and you will see what I mean! Fisher built up a team of dedicated technical staff and actors which would create some of the most memorable Hammer films.

Since *The Curse of Frankenstein* went so well, Hammer began planning a sequel in *The Revenge of Frankenstein* (1957). In the meantime they decide to take another classic figure, *Dracula* and adapt him for the screen. This was far more complicated than *Frankenstein* and involved an agreement with Universal over copyright issues. Since finance was hard to come by, the National Film Finance Council came up with some of the funds and the rest came from Universal in exchange for distribution rights.

The script for *Dracula* again drew criticism from the censors but Hammer went ahead anyway and began filming on 11 November 1957. Peter Cushing played Van Helsing, a refined if not self-righteous vampire hunter

and Christopher Lee as Count Dracula. These roles were to become the defining interpretation of the Dracula legend. *Dracula* proved a bigger success than either Hammer or Universal imagined and with the blessing of Universal, adaptations of a range of horror classics were now to follow.

In quick succession Hammer moved to make *The Mummy* (1959), *The Phantom of the Opera* (1962) and collaborated with William Castle on a remake of *The Old Dark House* (1963). Along the way they also made a range of non horror films including comedies and mysteries such as *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1959) starring Peter Cushing as Sherlock Holmes.

Some of the more eccentric Hammer productions were what we would now consider politically incorrect films. After first showing, these films literally sat on the shelf until recently being released on DVD as part of the "Icons of Adventure" Hammer box set. In the DVD collection they are coupled with a couple of Hammer pirate classics (*The Pirates of Blood River* and *The Devil Ship*) to try and make their tone a little less over the top, but they are still incredibly out of date and somewhat insensitive. If they are taken as fun caricatures they are really very amusing and packed with action.

Christopher Lee is a superb Fu Manchu look-alike in the *Terror of the Tongs* (1961) where he plays an evil Chinese crime lord who has killed the daughter of a local ship's captain who is now out for revenge.

The *Strangers of Bombay* (1960) is based on the Thuggee cult, who worshipped Kali, the blood Goddess, and strangled strangers in her honour. This is the tale of the battle between the British and the Thuggee in the days of Empire with all the glory imperialism can offer.



The studio continued to expand through the 1960's and during May 1968 was awarded the



Queen's Award to Industry in recognition of their contribution to the British economy. Things began to change, however, as Michael Carreras took more and more control of the studio. He expanded the output of the studio to include many, psychological thrillers and unusual one-off horrors such as *Rasputin* (1966), *Plague of the Zombies* (1966) and even some caveman titles such as *One Million Years B.C.* (1966), which was followed by *Slave Girls* (1968), *When Dinosaurs Ruled the Earth* (1970) and *Creatures the World Forgot* (1971).

Plague of the Zombies is an example of Hammer creativity. It is a very early zombie film and has sequences which many believe influenced George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*.

There is a small village in Cornwall; it is isolated, superstitious and has little love for outsiders. It is being wiped out by a strange disease and the local doctor is trying to help. He has hit a brick wall as the locals do not trust him and the villagers are dying like flies. In desperation he calls in his mentor to help as it seems that after the plague has killed its victims they return as the living dead.

This is an innovative and fascinating Hammer film, filled to the brim with haunting images, excellent acting and even some sexy young women.

It has a very different type of story which moves quickly into voodoo and the use of slave labour in a local mine. We have a fine combination of social message and a unique plot with some great special effects in the form of the living dead.



Some have argued the horror films of this period became a little formulaic but at the same time they became more daring in the field of eroticism. Prior to the Sixties Hammer had pushed a lot of boundaries but were now more careful with sex. In the Sixties Michael Carreras decided that now was the time to explore some new territory and so the horny Hammer horror period began ! Many mark the first film in this category to be *Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed* where there is a rape scene. Cushing was not impressed but it went ahead anyway.

Between 1959 and 1974 Hammer also felt that the best way to expand their profits was to create sequels. Long before *The Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Halloween* series, Hammer hit on the same formula and developed *Frankenstein*, *Dracula* and *The Mummy* into a series of films.

Six sequels to *The Curse of Frankenstein* were produced between 1959 and 1974: *The Revenge of Frankenstein* (1959), *The Evil of Frankenstein* (1964), *Frankenstein Created Woman* (1967), *Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed* (1969), *The Horror of Frankenstein* (1970) and *Frankenstein and the Monster from Hell* (1974).

Following *Dracula* (1958), there were eight other films; *The Brides of Dracula* (1960), *Dracula: Prince of Darkness* (1966), *Dracula Has Risen from the Grave* (1968), *Taste the Blood of Dracula* (1969), *Scars of Dracula* (1970), *Dracula AD 1972* (1972), *The Satanic Rites of Dracula* (1973) and *The Legend of the 7 Golden Vampires* (1974). The final film was made in conjunction with Shaw Bros and was a vampire martial arts fusion film.

The *Dracula* films really had some problems finding the right niche. When *Scars of Dracula* failed, even with increased gore, Hammer tried



a more hip and cool *Dracula* in *Dracula AD 1972*, which was also a box office failure. The final attempt was *The Legend of the 7 Golden Vampires* which began an instant cult classic. It is rather fun, especially with the strange Fu - Manchu style vampire and martial-arts action but it really was the end of the line for Hammer and vampires.

The Mummy (1959) was followed with a range of films which were not really in any way relayed to the first. They included *The Curse of the Mummy's Tomb* (1964), *The Mummy's Shroud* (1966) and *Blood from the Mummy's Tomb* (1971).

When most people think of Hammer they think of the overt horror films. However after the success of *Psycho*, Michael Carreras felt that Hammer could produce a range of low-budget psychological thriller which would market well. These films still work rather well today, they all have rather nasty characters, very strange plot twists and you are never quite sure where they are going until the very end. The first was *Taste of Fear* (1961) and continued with *Maniac* (1963), *Paranoiac* (1963), *Nightmare* (1964), *Hysteria* (1965), *Fanatic* (1965), *The Nanny* (1965), *Crescendo* (1970), *Straight on Till*





Morning (1972) and ended in 1972 with *Fear in the Night*. Many received quite excellent reviews in the press with some, such as *The Nanny*, becoming cult favorites.

The Seventies were a difficult time for Hammer, their classic horror imagery was no longer cutting it and the eroticism currently in the market was way beyond the small amount of cleavage they have shown thus far. Sure they had pushed the boundaries a little but this was now the Seventies and sex was everywhere on show. Hammer decided it must join the crowd to survive and began to release vampire films stacked with nudity, sex and woman-on-woman love.

These films are known as the Carmilla or Karnstein series and focus on the wild sexual exploits of female vampires. This new approach for Hammer began with *The Vampire Lovers* (1970), a marvellous romp starring the voluptuous Ingrid Pitt as a bisexual vampire. Pitt continued her role as a sexually adventurous cult figure in *Countess Dracula* (1971) which mixed together the vampire legend with the tale of Elizabeth Bathory and her desire for the blood of young nubile girls.

The Carmilla series continued with *Lust for a Vampire* (1971).



Considered to be one of the more outrageous Hammer films, the storyline is about the fun a naughty vampire can have in a girls school ! It is a film that had always divided Hammer fans; some write it off as a terrible embarrassment while others enjoy it for its camp quality.

Karnstein Castle has been in ruins for as long as anyone remembers, it now overlooks an exclusive finishing school for girls. Richard Les-trange takes up the post of English teacher and soon begins a clandestine relationship with one of the girls, the beautiful, beguiling Mircalla Karnstein.

The school has hit a bad time recently as it is plagued by mysterious deaths. Attempts to cover up the killings fail and when one of the fathers investigates the death of his daughter he opens her grave to find a bite on her neck. It seems that the Karnstein family has returned. Along the way we are treated to lots of nudity, lesbian love, blood and even a psychedelic dream sequence. Soon, however, it all comes to a horrid end as the villagers descend on the school demanding revenge. Richard rushes to warn his young love of the impending danger. As they embrace she opens her mouth to bite his neck, but before she can sink those pearly whites into his throat, a beam of wood crashes from the roof impaling her through the heart.

The series ended with *Twins of Evil* (1971) which is quite different from the first two in the series. It centres on the bored Count Karstein, who takes to dabbling in Satanism and ends up resurrecting Mircalla Karnstein who initiates him into vampirism. As one would expect, this results in a sharp increase of deaths in the village. Unluckily for Karstein, there is a puritan militia in town called the brotherhood run by the very upright Gustav Weil (Cushing). He is not known for his compassion and even when his



niece becomes infected he threatens her with execution. As the infection spreads, a showdown between the puritans and the vampires begins. Starring two Playboy Playmates the film may have looked good but Playmates are not known for their acting ability.

Even with the added sex and blood, Hammer could not really compete with the new generation of Horror hitting the market. They tried a few other twists including the unusual *Vampire Circus* (1972) and the truly eccentric *Captain Kronos, Vampire Hunter*, (1974) but their days were numbered.

Since Satanic horror films were becoming popular in the aftermath of *Rosemary's Baby* and later *The Exorcist*, Hammer decided to have a go at the genre and what it came up with is a truly strange and bizarre film, *To the Devil a Daughter* (1976). Hammer approached a number of directors for the project including Ken Russell (imagine what he would have done with the film). In the end they decided on Peter Sykes who had directed *Demons of the Mind*.

To the Devil a Daughter was based on a novel by Dennis Wheatley. Wheatley was an enigmatic author of pulp crime and occult novels and took the subject terribly seriously; this was the third adaptation by Hammer of his work. This time he was so horrified with what they did to his novel he vowed never to allow Hammer to adapt one of his books again !

The film has a great look; it is far more modern than any other Hammer films and manages to bring occult themes into a contemporary setting. Widmark is superb as the sceptical writer who has grave doubts about the reality of the occult and Lee is utterly superb as the defrocked priest. The problem is with the ending.



The story is that Sykes decided in the editing room to change the conclusion of the film and the result is a true anti-climax. In interviews Christopher Lee has denounced the changes made to the film and stated he believes it completely destroys the integrity of his performance and the movie as a whole.

Occult writer John Verney (Richard Widmark) is asked by his friend Henry Beddows to pick up his daughter Catherine from the airport and allow her to stay with him for a while. She is a member of a heterodox religious order called *The Children of the Lord* which is under the control of defrocked priest Father Michael Rayner (Christopher Lee).

Rayner will stop at nothing to get Catherine back as she is central to a secret practice within his order, the awakening of Astaroth. It seems that on her 18th birthday she will become a living embodiment of this ancient deity. When Verney won't budge, Rayner uses black magic to get Catherine back and the battle begins for Catherine's soul.

Regardless of the creative changes that this film brought about within Hammer, it was the last film they made.



While Michael Carreras had an array of scripts on hand and even had dummy posters made to show to prospective investors, no new films eventuated.

Hammer Films still exists but has not had a lot of success producing new films. They experimented with a television series, Hammer House of Horror and floated lots of new plans, but none came to fruition.

After more than two decades of absence, Hammer Films has returned, at least to the small screen. Their new film, *Beyond the Rave*, has been released as an online serial at <http://www.beyondtherave.net/>.

Beyond the Rave has been produced for Hammer by Pure Grass Films, from an original story by Tom Grass. While there has been a lot of hype, the reviews for *Beyond the Rave* have been uniformly terrible. Hammer is also working on a more traditional film release called *The Resident*. It is directed by Antti Jokinen and stars Oscar-winning actress Hilary Swank and Jeffrey Dean Morgan. The *Resident* is fully financed by Hammer's parent company Exclusive Media Group and marks the first feature from the company to be filmed in the



Jeffrey Dean Morgan co-stars in *The Resident*

United States.

It also features the return of veteran actor Christopher Lee, making his first on-screen appearance for Hammer since *To The Devil A Daughter*. During the shoot Lee celebrated his 87th birthday and was given a knighthood in the Queen's birthday honours, in recognition of his acting career and charity work.

I can only hope they can do credit to the heritage they have had inherited. Somehow I do not think it is likely. Hammer horror films were a unique combination of time and place, they were a product of a certain cultural sensibility and mood; a combination that no longer exists. The world has moved on since the great days of Hammer Studios and their continuing relevance as films is because they are a "time capsule" of times long past, trying to cash in on the name today just doesn't seem quite right.

The majority of Hammer films are available on DVD in most regions. They come in myriad versions and vary in quality greatly.



It is sometimes bewildering to find a representative collection, so if you want to explore the world of Hammer, a great set is The Ultimate Hammer Collection. It is only available in England (R2) and is from Optimum Releasing, but is worth the effort of importing a set. It is a 21 DVD set and includes all the major Hammer horror titles.



BOOKS & PRINT

Desolation Road
Ian McDonald
Pyr
Prometheus Books 2009

Reviewer
Bob Estreich

Ian McDonald has crafted a strange novel, a series of interlocking chapters following the terraforming of Mars. It is science fiction but has elements of fantasy and spirituality that make it much more.

The terraforming organization, ROTECH, remains in orbit carrying out its work and it has attained almost mystical powers to those people on the planet. It is on ROTECH that their civilization, such as it is, depends. Although the planet is still being terraformed there are a lot of people on the planet already.

Many serve the Bethlehem Ares Railroad, a huge mining and transport conglomerate that effectively rules the planet. They have constructed a railway network across the planet so future mineral discoveries can be exploited. Settlements have sprung up wherever enough water can be pumped to the surface from the aquifers, since it has not rained on Mars for millions of years.

Their operation is based on a system called Industrial Feudalism in which each person has a place and is expected to obey the company in all its decisions. Its workers are not always happy with the system that suppresses any deviation from the company norm.

Out in the desert a small oasis supports communications towers and construction and repair facilities for the railroad. It has been abandoned for years.

A traveler, Dr Alimantando, is marooned here when his transport is blown away. Gradually

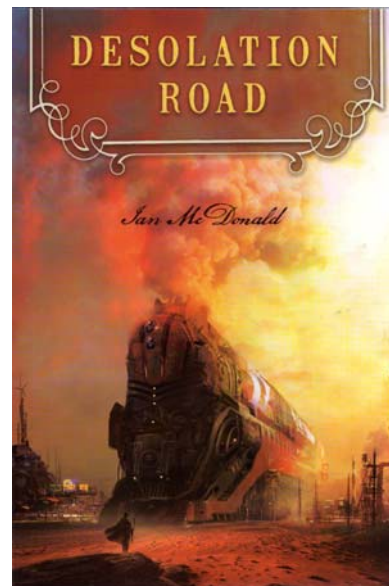
other people finish up at the tiny settlement and its population grows. Its importance to the history of Mars will be out of proportion to its size. Its people have grown up independent of the companies and some will try

to spread that freedom to the rest of the world. The little settlement is inadvertently named Desolation Road instead of Destination Road.

The stories follow the progress of the people of the village as Mars matures and eventually revolts against the company. There are many parallels with the early settlement of the United States. Mysticism, spirituality and magic play their part as well. There are even Biblical touches.

McDonald's style is a little flowery at first, but after a while it gives the story the feel of an oral legend being repeated to newcomers. Much the same as the Bible, in fact. This feeling of oral tradition really suits such a sweeping story and it gives the story a deeper feel of credibility that I really enjoyed.

I only have one problem with the book. The spelling errors are atrocious. Do the publishers know what a spelling checker is? Or has the book been OCR-ed from an earlier print and not checked afterwards? Still, it's a minor niggle about a superb book.



Mini
The True and Secret History of the Making of
a Motorcar
2009
Simon Garfield
Published by Faber and Faber
Allen & Unwin

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

First, in the interests of Truth in Advertising, I must declare my love for the Mini. I bought mine in 1971, an ex-racing 1310cc Mini Cooper S (Australian version) that could pull a genuine 130 miles per hour and sometimes even touch the road at that speed. Its acceleration was amazing, its roadholding was astounding, its need for maintenance demanding. Above all it was FUN and if you have never driven a Mini you have missed out of one of life's great experiences on wheels.

The book covers the development from Alex Issigonis' first concepts through many of the varieties it spawned, all the way from the first ones in 1959 up to today's BMW mini. At first I thought of the BMW as a "pretend" Mini but since riding in my daughter's car I have changed my opinion. It is a worthy successor to the original, and I can't help thinking that this is what the "old" Mini would have eventually evolved into had it continued in production.

The book is naturally very British-oriented. The concept is discussed in detail and there is an honest appraisal of the car's defects. It was meant to be a cheap city car and many of the defects were simply an attempt to keep the cost down. In the base model even interior door han-

dles were an option. There were many industrial problems in Britain at the time and the Mini production line did not miss out. Its makers, British Leyland, did not have a good reputation for quality.

Gradually, though, the public came to love the cheeky little "brick" and even to customise their cars.

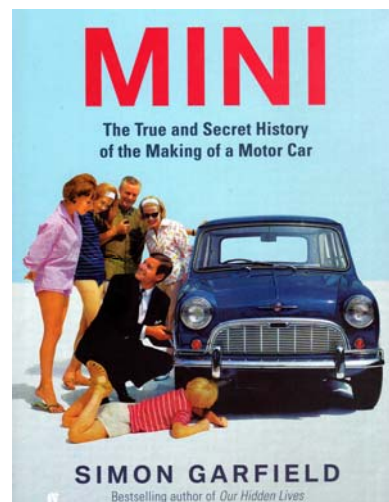
Perhaps it was only natural that some hoon would sooner or later race one and the development through the Mini Cooper and Mini Cooper S is covered. It is a shame that they missed out on the Australian versions, though. One of Australia's most popular racetracks is at Bathurst. In the early days it featured many tight curves on the narrow upper section of the track which made it perfect Mini country, and there were many spectacular photos of Minis lifting two wheels off the track in enthusiastic cornering.

One of these photos would have been ideal in this book. The New South Wales Police put bigger carburetors on the Cooper S and used the Minis for pursuit cars for some time. The sight of a huge policeman getting out of a tiny Mini would also be a worthy addition to the book. In

fairness the British police also used them and there is a wonderful photo of a group of police standing beside their toy-like Minis.

Many of the legitimate Mini variants are covered in detail, as it was upgraded often throughout its lifetime. The engine got bigger, the interior trim improved, many of the options became standard. There was a jeep variant, the Mini Moke. Even this was customised with a tiny load tray in case you wanted to carry a shoebox or something around town.

There is a lovely example in the old Hywell Bennett movie *Percy*. Even



more famous and perhaps the greatest film ever made according to Mini lovers is the 1969 film *The Italian Job* starring Michael Caine. It represented all that was good about the Mini to its fans – the Mini was presented as cheeky, fast, agile and fun.

These films were fine promotional vehicles (sorry) for the Mini, but the book also shows a wealth of the advertising material of the times. There is so much advertising aimed at different characteristics of the Mini that it seems the advertising executives were not quite sure what feature to promote next. I am a bit uncertain, however, about what they were promoting in the photo of a Mini panel-van with a worried-looking sheep in the back.

Simon Garfield has talked to many of those concerned with the Mini – the drivers, factory workers, engineers and all the others whose work gave the Mini its personality and cult following. Their stories help to explain why a tiny poorly-made little steel box with an antique engine became such a legend worldwide. There is a wealth of factory and engineering detail, drawings and concept art.

Even the best of times must come to an end and the Mini ceased production in 2000. Like the Volkswagen, though, it wouldn't stay dead. Its resurrection as the new Mini is covered in detail. Unlike the VW the Mini seems to have recaptured some of its old magic among a new generation of drivers. It is far more refined and streamlined than the old model but the stylists have kept fairly faithfully to the overall looks.

have kept fairly faithfully to the overall looks. The new engine is very, very good. The car is also far more expensive. In spite of this it has an individuality which is missing in the bland egg-shaped cars of today. Even at my age it's good to watch one weaving rapidly through traffic and say "That's a Mini. I used to own one of them".

If there is a Mini fan in your family, here is a surefire Christmas present.

Moxyland
Lauren Beukes
Angry robot books
Harper Collins (2009)

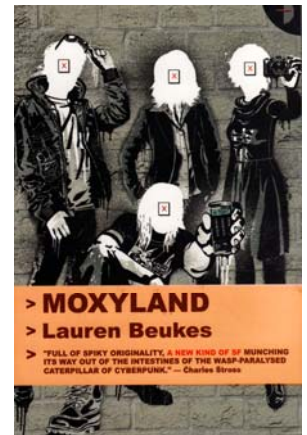
South Africa, ten years in the future. Apartheid is alive and well, but this time it's discrimination between the *corporati* – the employees of the big companies – and the rest. The privileged *corporati* have their own trains, their private beaches, and a tame South African Police Force to protect them using genetically modified dogs.

The rest of the people have to make do as best they can. They live in poverty or crime, part of the cities but never part of the corporate world unless the *corporati* have a use for them.

One such is Lerato. A baby raised in an orphanage run by a communications corporation, she is now one of their most brilliant programmers. Her future career is tied almost unbreakably to the corporation. Her privileged lifestyle is not enough to satisfy her and she is dabbling with a group of social revolutionaries by helping them defeat corporate security systems.

What she is doing is extremely dangerous since the corporations demand total loyalty from their people and disloyalty will earn severe punishment.

Toby is one of the underprivileged but he is doing OK for himself by producing a popular broadcast



blog and getting involved with the underground revolutionaries. He hopes this is where the best news will be. He tends to think of everything in terms of whether it could be a broadcast scoop for him.

Kendra is borderline. She has allowed herself to be genetically modified as an experimental human advert for a soft drink corporation. She is an art school dropout but she is gradually gaining a little fame and money as a photographer. She is also strongly involved in anti-corporate activities. She gets by with her corporate "sponsorship" but in return they impose a code of conduct on her that is almost as harsh as that of their employees.

Tendeka is a dedicated revolutionary. He survives in the slums by using his wits and overseas money. He genuinely believes that revolution is the only way the greater population will ever have any improvement in their life.

Life in this corporate-based culture revolves around the mobile phone. It is your communications, your bank account and credit card, and it allows you to access basic functions like the railway stations or your home.

It has a "defuser" built in – a device that can deliver a stunning electric shock to anyone targeted by the Police. It also makes you easier to track if the Police are interested in you, and surveillance is an ever-present part of this world.

So far the revolutionaries have been able to get away with minor acts of urban mischief, like hacking into corporate billboard data streams and inserting their own messages. Sooner or later the corporations will react. Sooner or later the hotheads in the revolution will turn from urban vandalism to outright terrorism. There will be an explosion that will rock South Africa.

Lauren Beukes has written a powerful novel of what so easily might be. She paints a high tech world of privilege versus despair, a world that she has seen in her own experience as a freelance journalist. The world of Moxyland is quite credible as it is based on fairly simple extensions of technology and events happening today. The people of South Africa are still coming out of the problems of apartheid and now Beukes is making the point that it could so easily happen again.

"...it's all possible, especially if we're willing to

trade away our rights for convenience, for the illusion of security"

I recommend this book to you. It's great science fiction, but it is also an important social warning.

My Other Wife is a Car Confessions of a Car Tragic

John M Wright

Allen & Unwin 2009

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

John Wright is a true car tragic. He has owned 120 cars in 34 years. It's not that he is indecisive, it's just that he buys cars, drives them for a while, then sells them to buy something more interesting. This method is not always successful and among his cars were some that were quite tragic themselves.

Even more tragically, he gave some of them names, and photographed the GT badge on one. His cars covered a wide spectrum of the vehicles available in Australia from his parents' old Armstrong Siddeley Whitley (itself named after a tragic World War 2 bomber) to the Lexus.

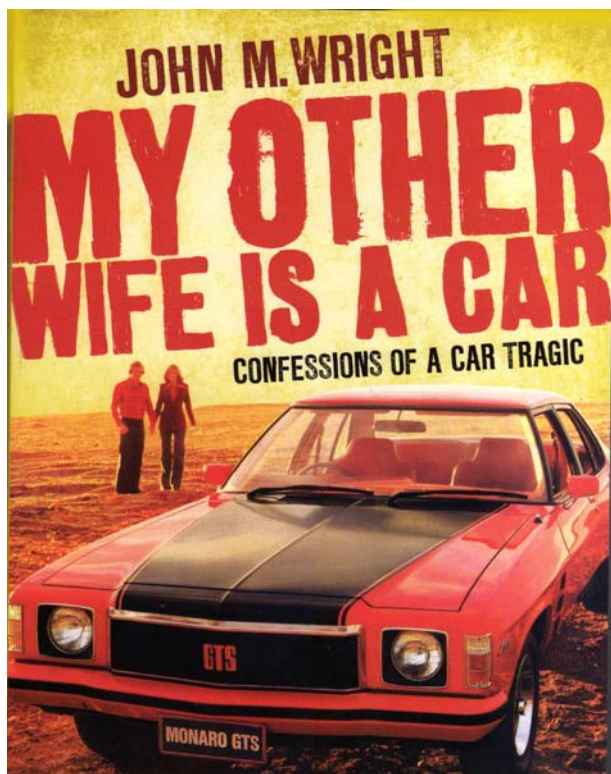
"Have you ever seen a car that looked more beautiful on a tow truck?"
(Jaguar XJ6)

For a long while he admitted to equating a car's performance to its top speed and 0-60kmh times. As the cars got faster he discovered that there was more to a good car than speed – such trivial matters as whether it would go around corners became more critical.

He has had more than a passing love affair with Alfas, Fiats and BMWs. He also became acquainted with more tragic cars such as the Polish export near-Fiat-copy.

"A car for freeways and boulevards, it was not afflicted by any hint of sophistication"
(The first Holden Monaro)

In his time he has reviewed cars for motoring magazines, raced them in the Targa Tasmania and at Bathurst and in his younger days he was apparently quite a street racer. He has also done his time as a car salesman, both new and used, and he unrepentantly tells of the tricks dealers use to sell a car at any price.



"They're lying, cheating bastards"
(said by car salesmen of their customers)

John is honest and even enthusiastic about the cars he has loved, but he is honest about the not-so-popular ones as well.

He has owned quite a few of these including the legendary Ford Falcon GTHO Phase III (killed by rust and fuel prices) and the Series III Jaguar (boils readily)

... *"designed from new to rust around the front and rear screens"*

"I like to joke about the Rangey (Rover) that it will take you places other vehicles won't go, but will not necessarily bring you back"

The book is a great, lighthearted look at Australian motoring over the years.

Among the rubbish cars that were foisted on Australians there were still the odd gems, and John Wright seems to have owned them all at some time.

The book is a great nostalgia trip for us old farts (sorry, more mature drivers) and even for the families who had to put up with our obsessions.

**The New Space
Opera 2**
Various authors
2009
Science Fiction
Published by
EOS
HarperCollins
(Australia)

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

It is a long time since I have enjoyed such an interesting range of possible futures in the SF genre. Nearly five hundred and fifty pages of well-written fiction cover all sorts of possibilities.

The term "space opera" used to be a derogatory term for lower quality science fiction, but of late it has come to mean stories spread across a wider stage peopled with larger-than-life characters, impressive technologies and galaxy-wide plots.

Many of the characters are caricatures, often stolen from other genres (as in Mike Resnick's *Catastrophe Baker*, a sort of Space Western, and the sort-of detective story *A Canticle For Liebowitz*, or Bill Willingham's *Fearless Space Pirates of the Outer Rings*). The results can be a good laugh as well as good reading.

There seems to be a preference in this issue for spaceship Artificial Intelligences. What happens if a ship's captain organizes a mutiny against her own ship's AI?

Or if the AI of a naval ship gets together with an enemy spaceship's AI and they decide to stop a war? (A serious tribute to Isaac Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics).

There is a wealth of concepts in this book. Editors Gardner Dozois and Jonathan Strahan have selected nineteen stories from as many authors, some quite well-known, and I didn't find a dull story among them.

I can't summarise any particular story as an example as I don't want to give away any of the plots. Give it a try. It may redefine "space opera" for you.



Peripheral Visions
Paul Kane
Short stories, SF Horror
Creative Guy
Publishing 2008

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

It's very hard to classify this book. Paul Kane's short stories are a mixture of different genres with a strong leaning towards the inner space of the mind. These stories particularly are brilliantly conceived and written.

Paul Kane has a very economic style of writing but he can pack so much into a few pages. His words are well chosen, his plots clearly and concisely outlined. The seven-page *Strobe*, for instance, sets up an overpowering addiction to a flashing light in the first couple of pages then tracks the degeneration through stronger and stronger lights until the finalwhatever is reached. In these few remaining pages he completes the plot credibly and even gives the addict a sympathetic personality.

He is also good at turning the conventional ideas on their head and examining the outcome. A family of robots buying a human child as a pet for their daughter and then learning how to look after it? The hardest part of *Lifelike* is the inability of the robot family to understand the concept of a living breathing organism – they can only treat the child as a defective robot, as real human life is outside their limited experience. Isn't this the way many humans treat their pets?

I found *Life Sentence* particularly poignant. It explores the possibility that, as life-prolonging technology improves, dying may become illegal, as may even wanting to die. If you succeed in finding a way to end your life, you will be brought back to serve a life sentence for the crime of trying to die. Even if you have nothing to live for you can be imprisoned until you change your mind. Until then, your life becomes a true life sentence. This possibility of an endless living death is one that I have not seen examined before. Paul manages to convey the desperation of wanting to die and the utter futility of trying. He gives the whole euthanasia debate a new, subtle, vicious twist.

And the most chilling story of all is the shortest – *Protege*.



Because each story is so different in its plot and approach this is a very easy book to come back to later. Each story explores a new idea and if, like me, you like to read in short bursts between other demands on your time, this book is very easy to enjoy. Ghosts, zombies, environmentalists, obsessives, blackmailers – they are all here in their own little beautifully crafted stories. This is a book worth reading for its good stories and for Mr.Kane's incredible imagination.

Scarlet: The Film
Magazine
Number 3
Scarlet Media

Scarlet The Film Magazine never ceases to amaze, each issue is filled with fascinating features, films that are not reviewed or even

discussed anywhere else and loads of erudite and informed content. It opens with another slice of "Music of the Night" offering information on all manner of unusual and fascinating soundtracks. We then receive our welcome for the issue including the sad tale of the editor having lost the whole issue and having to rebuild from ground up. As an editor I sympathize with his suffering and congratulate him on still producing a superb issue !

The Old Dark Library again gives us some great reviews of interesting books, while the Screening Room all sorts of film reviews. Since Forrest J Ackerman has recently passed, there are a couple of excellent and nostalgic pieces on his life and memories about his life and work. He will certainly be missed.

This is followed with a great article by David Skal and Jessica Rains "Mr.Rains goes to Burbank" on Claude Rains with some very nice rare photographs, something Scarlet seems to be developing a reputation for. Vampires and Space Probes and Snails looks at *The Return of Dracula* (1958) as well as a look at *The Flame Barrier*, a film which was double billed with it by United Artists. Linda Miller is a great profile of a superb artist who sadly died at the young age of 48 in 2008 after producing a body of impressive character based work.

The Cross and the Cauldron, Part 1:Classic Hollywood by Paul Leggett and art by Linda



Miller is a superb examination of Christian themes within horror themes, regardless of your religion (or lack of it, like me!), this is an insightful piece showing how the use of Christian symbolism encodes so many horror films. I am looking forward to further articles in this series.

Elias Merhige on *The Begotten* looks at an unusual film called *Shadow of a Vampire* (which we are reviewing this issue) and is an interview with the director. Robert Quarry is another reflection on a recently passed significant horror personage. It is sad to realize that we are now reaching a time when so many great actors and directors are joining the "heavenly film crew", at the same time it is nice to reader people's memories, so often if they are not put into print they are forgotten and lost to time. This is followed by an extensive review of "The Midnight Meat Train" the new Clive Barker inspired genre breaking horror film and some further reviews.

All in all, another brilliant issue from Scarlet !!

Email: scarletthefilmmag@yahoo.com

Tenebrarum Issue One

Tenebrarum is unlike any other magazine you will have seen; indeed it is more like a cinematic monograph than a traditional magazine. There are no regular features or reviews, but simply a truly comprehensive examination of one classic film each issue. When I say comprehensive, I mean some 100 pages of discussion, reviews, posters, lobby cards and more. It is bi-lingual, superbly written and filled to the brim with rare images. It is erudite, insightful and informed.

The first issue is on the controversial cannibal film *Cannibal Holocaust*, it offers everything from a discussion of the screenplay to examinations of religious and psychological symbolism within the film. There are reviews of the film itself and debates about its influence on motion picture history. There is a solid biography of Ruggero Deodato and lots of amazing and rare screenshots, lobby cards, posters and photos.

This is the first issue of this new publication and I am excited about what it has to offer. Future

issues are planned on Argento's *Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, Andrea Bianchi's *Burial Ground*, Bruno Mattei's *Virus* or *Hell of the Living Dead* and Lucio Fulci's *City of the Living Dead*. This series could end up as a literal encyclopedia of genre cinema from horror to cannibal films, cult classics to Giallo. It is certainly a worthy addition to ever genre film lover's library.

Web: <http://www.tenebrarum.de>

The Wolf

**Richard Guilliat and Peter Hohnen
2009**

Military History

**Published by William Heinemann Australia
Random House Australia**

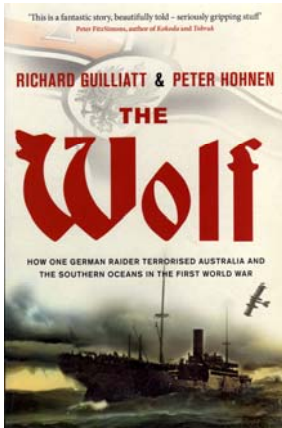
Reviewer: Bob Estreich

The Wolf is the story of a successful commerce raider, a German merchant ship converted to a warship in World War 1 to harass allied shipping. Germany was in dire straits. The Royal Navy had blockaded German ports and essential imports like fertiliser and food were not getting in. Germany had a powerful Navy of its own but the Kaiser was unwilling to risk it in a confrontation with the British fleet, so it stayed in port.

The British had their own problems. Like Germany they were dependent on imports and these were being choked off by the almost unrestricted submarine warfare waged by the German Navy. This was so effective that there was really little need for Germany to field its capital ships. Meanwhile in the rest of the world's oceans Allied shipping was almost free from interference. This included the vital food trade from Australia and New Zealand and the troop reinforcements being sent from there.

The commerce raider concept was designed to harry this mostly unprotected shipping. A raider would sow sea mines in the approaches to harbours, sink shipping, and generally make a nuisance of itself. This would divert important defensive ships from the Atlantic convoys and give the submarines a better chance of a kill. It was good value from Germany's point of view. The ships were converted from merchantmen that could not otherwise be used and their cargo space could hold captured crews, extra fuel and any goods taken from the captured ships.





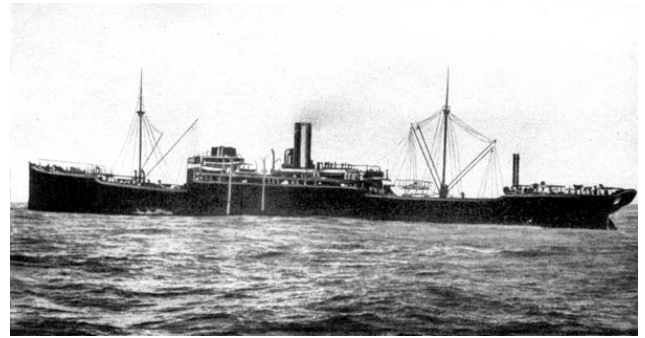
They were fitted with heavy guns hidden by drop-down panels along the side of the ship. They would be self sufficient as far as possible, not putting into port and keeping out of radio contact. Their mobility was their strength. They could not fight a running gun battle with a modern warship so it was

prudent to slip away and start up again somewhere else.

The drawback was that ships need regular maintenance and would eventually break down or finally have a run in with a warship. The results of such encounters were rarely in the raider's favour and their sorties earned a reputation as suicide missions.

The Wolf's beginning was not auspicious. Originally christened the Jupiter, it ran aground and was almost destroyed before it left the Baltic. Rebuilt as the Wolf it was put under the command of Kapitan Karl Nerger. Nerger was a bit of an outcast in the Navy. He was from the wrong social background and had a de-facto wife and four children as the Navy had not given him permission to marry. He was a competent captain and spent a long time preparing the Wolf for its mission. His task was to drop mines off Cape Town, the ports of India and Ceylon, and Australia and New Zealand. He would then continue to attack shipping as long as possible.

His biggest advantage was the incompetence of the Allied naval authorities. As ships ran into Nerger's mines the authorities blamed saboteurs on the docks – they could not believe that a raider was around. As ship after ship disappeared the blame was repeatedly put on saboteurs, bad weather, espionage – anything but the truth. Their position turned from incompetence to a coverup. Partly this was political. The Australian and New Zealand navies had no minesweepers and most of their capital ships were seconded to the British navy in the Atlantic. This was an admission that the public would not want to hear. Nerger had a fairly free run of the oceans and militarily his mission was a success. The ship was at sea for 444 days and travelled an estimated 64,000 miles. More than 138,000 tons of shipping was sunk or damaged. Where this book excels is in the human aspect of the voyage. The authors have gone to a lot of



trouble to research the people on the ship, both the 350 crew and the (eventually) 467 prisoners. Conditions on the ship were dreadful with overcrowding, disease and dissatisfaction among the crew. In spite of this many friendships were formed between the Germans and their prisoners. Nerger appears to have been a relatively humane man but he had to rely on food and coal from captured ships. This left the ship with a deficient diet and eventually scurvy and other diseases broke out. It says much for Nerger that few of his prisoners died on the voyage.

Other people were affected by the Wolf's voyage. Although the British Naval Intelligence Service suspected a commerce raider was at large their warnings were disregarded by the Australian and New Zealand governments and naval staff. The local newspapers whipped up anti-German sentiment and many innocent Australians and South Africans of German origin were interned or persecuted during the war. Families of missing seamen were left completely uninformed of the fate of their menfolk and it was only when the Germans released the news of the completion of the Wolf's voyage that they found that their men had not died at sea after all.

Nerger was determined to bring his ship home to the Baltic at the end of his mission. This alone was a brilliant feat of seamanship since it required taking the now worn-out, dreadfully slow freighter through some of the coldest, roughest ocean in the world and dodging the British blockade and his own submarines along the way. Although he was feted as a hero, his glory was soon overshadowed by other more socially acceptable and self-promoting captains of ships like the Emden and Seeadler.

I found the book compelling reading as much for the human side as for the historical information. It is essential reading in so many fields of military history. The authors have done a brilliant job of humanising this relatively small by-way of the war that had such a big effect.

HORROR ON DVD

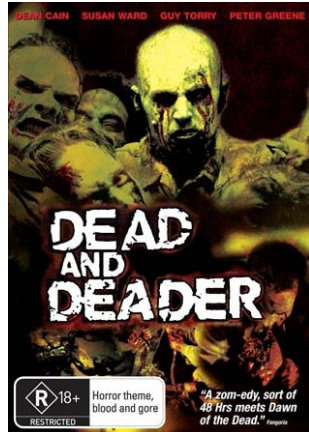


Dead and Deader Anchor Bay R4 DVD

Landing in Cambodia, a U.S. Special Forces team is sent to investigate a missing unit. It finds all the members of the missing team dead and a strange mutant form of scorpion isolated in a specimen case. Before they can investigate they are attacked by flesh eating zombies and the team wiped out. Their bodies are returned to the States for autopsy and burial, but just before the first incision of the autopsy, Lieutenant Quinn (Dean Cain) wakes up ! However, there is a problem, he has no pulse or heat beat, he is clearly dead yet still obviously still living. Soon they realize he not only has greater strength than a normal person but phenomenal healing qualities.

As the doctors attempt to examine him he convulses and taking a scalpel removes one of the scorpions from his arm. It seems these little blighters cause the dead to return to the land of the living. If you catch them quick enough you remain with brain function, though still needing doses of raw meat to stave off the "hunger", but if they reach your heart you become one of the rampaging flesh eating living dead.

Soon Quinn realizes that the rest of his team



have not been so lucky and are now out trolling for flesh. He can sense their presence and sets off to neutralize them. Before he can get to him, one of his mates infects the army base and a splatterfest begins with heads flying into fans, an arm in a mincemeat machine and lots more fun gory action.

Since the army chef Judson (Guy Torry) has also been implicated in the killings, he teams up with Quinn and sets out to round up the zombies before the infection spreads. Of course nobody believes them and soon they are not only fighting against the zombie hordes but evading the police as well. The teaming of Quinn and Judson allows for a "buddy" element to enter the film with lots of humour and jokes. It is this combination which really turns *Dead and Deader* into a successful zombie comedy.

The plot becomes more complicated when a group of redneck bikers try and hold them for a possible police reward but soon the bar is attacked by zombies and a new series of over the top scenes unfold including a rather entertaining zombie dwarf whose bite lands in just the wrong place ! At this stage Quinn and Judson are joined by Holly (Susan Ward) and together they work to track down the last remaining member of the original squad. Things are not as easy as they seem as soon they are captured by a nefarious doctor who being riddled with cancer sees the scorpions as a last chance for extending his life.

This is a fun, B Grade zombie romp, filled with atrocious acting, silly dialogue and some great special effects. The zombie fight scenes are deliberately exaggerated and add to the humour of the whole experience, expect lots of green blood and gore !

Also features an audio commentary with writer Steve Kriozere and producer Mark Altman, Raising the Dead: The making of Dead and Deader and a Photo gallery.



The Dead Inside

2005/ Released 2009

Canada

Supernatural suspense

Frontline Films

Written, directed, produced, edited by Brian Clement

Web: <http://www.frontlinefilms.net/>

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

John Katzen and Lola Morgandy are detectives who specialise in paranormal events. The owner of a house has asked them to examine it, as he is having trouble renting it. Past tenants have disappeared, others have left after only a few days. They have reported nightmares and strange appearances. There is even a spot in the attic where gravity appears to work backwards. What the detectives find is far more sinister than a haunted house.

A previous tenant has been experimenting with interdimensional travel. It looks like he may have partly succeeded and part of our dimension has entered another one. The occupants of that dimension are trying to come through. They are "feeding" off the memories of the people in the house and substituting nightmares and memories that may or may not be real. Eventually they take control of the weakened minds of the tenants. If the tenants can't leave the house before that happens they disappear into the other dimension. Entire families have been swallowed up.

Katzen and Morgandy enlist the help of Professor Fallstead, an astrophysicist, to try to sort out the problem. A rogue scientist Dr Koeppler is also in the house. He was experimenting in the same area of physics as the missing scientist

and his wife disappeared during the experiment. This rather unprepared group must find a way to close the gap into the other dimension before its occupants finally become powerful enough to break through.

Despite being a low-budget one-man show, this is no amateur-looking film. *The Dead Inside* is very well crafted and beautifully filmed. The plot is more intelligent than the usual gorefest and the actors are very good in their parts. Chuck DePape (Katzen) particularly gets a part where he can show more character than the average hero of a film of this type and Bronwyn Lee (Morgandy) gives a great performance as his tough, unflappable sidekick. Jason Ward's special makeup effects are skilful and not over the top. Even in the nightmare battle scenes he does not get carried away.

The film is set in the 1940s and the period look is well managed.

Somehow the period seems just right for the film, yet it is suggested almost entirely by the cast's costumes. This is a real tribute to the set dressers and costume directors.

It takes a little while for the plot to settle down and until then the viewer will be as mystified as Katzen and Morgandy. After that as the tension rises, the ominous feeling grows stronger as the players realise that they are being hunted themselves.

Brian Clement has departed a little from his earlier zombie films (the *Meat Market* films, *Exhumed*) and this film shows he has the talent to produce a good serious piece rather than just a me-too zombie flick.

The Dead Inside has been selected for showing at a number of film festivals but seems little known outside this area. Hopefully this DVD release will correct that.



Doomed to Consume
2009

Zombie Horror
USA

Produced by Jason Stephenson and Jon Warner

Directed by Jason Stephenson

Not For The Squeamish Productions

Distributed by New Blood Entertainment

Web: <http://www.newbloodentertainment.biz>

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

Not another zombie movie! Well, yes, but this one is far better than average. It doesn't rely on buckets of blood, but features good acting, good script, and good production values.

It looks a bit low budget but this is as much due to the depressed rural area of the U.S where it takes place, and overall it's a well made film.

A zombie virus has hit the States and most of the population is infected or dead. Two young uninfected women are hiding out in a farmhouse but their time is limited as they run out of water.

Three young men passing through the area run out of petrol and they all band together to get to a safer place.

One by one they are picked off by the zombies. Unusually for a zombie film, these can move quite fast when chasing their prey.

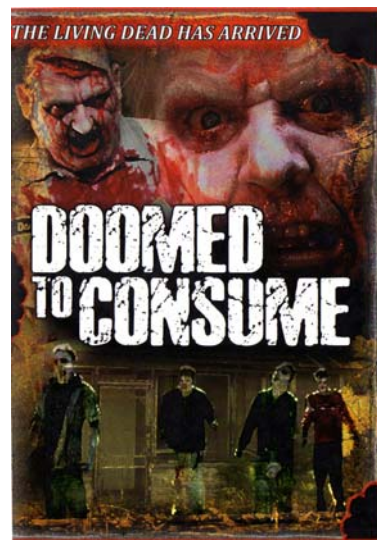
I could never understand why being a zombie meant that you immediately forgot how to use your legs and voice. If anything, a zombie able to run after you is more terrifying than the usual shambling disjointed stagger.

In the end, their "sanctuary" is just as dangerous



as the place they left. Despite their caution we can see that some of them will not survive.

The script makes a credible attempt at injecting some personality into the characters and the story is stronger for it.



The makeup and effects are excellent – somewhat understated for a change, but there should still be enough gore here to satisfy anyone.

The story even finishes on a slight note of hope instead of the "everyone dies in a swamp of blood" conventional ending.

I quite liked this film. It takes a common genre and does it better than most. Its producers, Not For The Squeamish Productions, consist of Jason Stephenson and Jon Warner (this film's producer and director).

They are obviously in love with the genre. They rely pretty much on a no-money budget and they appeal for likeminded actors, crew and extras to volunteer their services. In this way, the whole film is a labour of love by enthusiasts.

It shows. The film works far better than so many low-budget attempts.

Give it a try for yourself.



**Dracula's Fiancée
Redemption 2009
Salvation Films
R0 DVD**

Dracula's Fiancée (*La Fiancée de Dracula*) is a strange gothic fantasy from Jean Rollin. It is one of his later films, dating from 2002, but still embodies his enigmatic cinematic style which mixes horror, eroticism and surrealism.

As with all of Rollin's films it has a dreamlike quality and mixes fantasy with horror as well as beautiful semi naked women. It has a look reminiscent of his Seventies classics *Requiem for a Vampire* (1975) and *Lips of Blood* (1975) and will be welcomed by fans.

The film opens as two vampire hunters, professor (Jacques Régis) and his assistant Eric (Denis Tallaron), lay in wait for the witching hour when a vampire will rise from the grave to meet her lover, in this case her lover is a dwarf jester! As the hour arises she returns from the netherworld to feed on her lover.

The hunters swoop and force the jester to reveal where "The Master" lies. It seems that there is a parallel universe to our world ruled over by "The Master" (Dracula). In our world many of the beings from this world (called parallels) seem insensible, but they are not mad, but simply exist in two worlds at once.

Soon the vampire hunters are on a strange and wonderful hunt for "The Master". They first meet a young mad girl guarding the "Murderers Tower", however, she is not as she seems and transforms into a baby eating Ogress at night.



As they get closer to their goal they find Isabella, the Fiancée of Dracula protected by a group of insane nuns. It seems that just being in the vicinity of a "parallel" is enough to turn the nuns strange. They smoke pipes, jump rope, have perverse art on the walls and revel in sisterly love.

Soon Isabella has been whisked away from right under the nose of our hunters and after various satanic rites and sacrifice of nuns, the stage is set for the return of "The Master".

This is another stylish excursion into the surreal from Rollins, it cannot be followed in a lineal manner; it is a visual feat with each image simply flowing from the last. Some of the images are just plain strange (Sister Pipe and Sister Cigar come to mind), while others are striking. A prime example being the nun who after having her heart removed stumbles as the living dead to the fire pit where she kisses her heart goodbye and drops it into a flame. A striking image. Of course being Jean Rollins the film is filled with semi naked women and eroticism.

The acting is of good quality, the cinematography ethereal and the score really adds to the otherworldly feel of the film.

This is really quite an unusual and enjoyable take on the vampire legend which is very different from what you will have seen before.



Eden Lake
Dimension Extreme
Madman
Entertainment
R4 DVD

Warp X is a British production company working to offer genre movies with an original twist and creative signature and if *Eden Lake* is a sign of what is to come they have a great future in front of them. They are released in Australia through Madman Entertainment.

Eden Lake is the debut from James Watkins who also wrote the script and it is certainly a powerful and confronting way to make your mark.

Eden Lake is not a horror film based on monsters, ghosts or supernatural themes; it is based on the most frightening and potentially destructive animal of all, man.

It is brutal, vicious and visceral, there are scenes which will make you want to look away but something compels you to keep watching. Yes, it is fair to say the violence is extreme, but it is in the context of a well defined plot with excellent character development and hence I believe it is justified.

Steve and Jenny need some time away and take a break at Eden Lake in the English countryside where Steve plans to propose. Things don't go well, the locals are obnoxious, and the room they rent on their first night is situated next to a very loud and annoying occupant.

As they attempt to relax by the lake their calm is interrupted by a gang of six teens playing loud music, behaving badly and refusing to control



their aggressive dog. While Jenny has the common sense to suggest they simply move to another location, Steve seems to have something to prove and decides to confront them; a very bad move. They rebuff his attempt at dialogue and soon a dangerous chess game develops and neither will step back from the obviously development disaster.

Soon verbal abuse leads to their SUV being vandalized and finally it is stolen when Steve stupidly leaves his keys in the ignition. Steve accidentally kills Brett's dog and the gang is now out for revenge. Brett has an obsessive attachment to his dog and is wants blood to pay for its death. He is out of control and manipulates the members of his gang using violence and fear.

In a truly harrowing scene Steve is captured and tied up with barbed wire and each member of the gang is encouraged to slash him with knives or other weapons while Brett's girlfriend records it all on a mobile phone. This is a terrifying portrayal of the power of one individual over a group and the way in which peer pressure can lead to the most extreme form of behaviour.

The character development in *Eden Lake* is exceptional. Steve and Jenny are credible as you see them fighting for their lives. Jack O'Connell as Brett offers a truly masterful performance, especially considering his young age.

The suspense of the chase, the inability to get away, the desire to escape with no exit in sight are all used to maximum effect in this chilling film.

While this plot is not particularly original, the mixture of solid character development, excellent cinematography and very realistic violence makes this a powerful horror film.



The Gathering
2002
Suspense
Britain
Granada Film
Reel DVD
R4 DVD

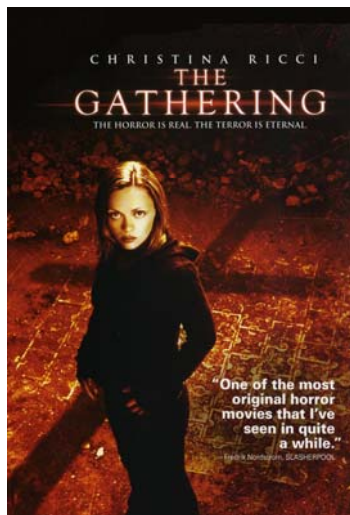
Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

At the Glastonbury Rock festival one night two young people steal off into the surrounding woods, but fall through a hole in the ground and are killed. Investigators find they have crashed through the roof of an old buried church.

As the church is investigated it is found to date back to the first century AD and may be connected to Joseph of Aramathea who was rumoured to have fled to Britain after the Crucifixion. The walls of the church are covered in magnificent rock carvings of peoples faces. The local Bishop is sure he has seen these faces before. What he finds terrifies him.

Meanwhile a young girl, Cassie (Christina Ricci) is hit by a car in a neighbouring village. She recovers almost miraculously with little more than a cut, but she has lost her memory of what she was doing in the village. The lady who was driving the car takes her home to shelter her while her memory recovers, and Cassie forms a close bond with the two children. Young Michael seems rather autistic and she forms a special bond with him.

Things start to turn strange. There is a mystery associated with the house, and Cassie starts having "visions" of terrible events involving Mi-



chael. As she walks through the village she notices a number of strangers watching her. They do not appear malevolent – they are just waiting and watching. While talking to the local villagers she has flashes of prescient vision showing them suffering massive injuries.

The two plotlines eventually come together in a finale which is every bit as horrifying as Cassie's visions predicted. There is one hope for the children – now Cassie is forewarned, she is fiercely protective of the kids. Will that be enough to save them from the fate that she has seen in her visions?

The film is one of contrasts, from the staid superstitions of religion to the pretty little village and its dour people, the dark events of the past, and to the mysterious people and heir role. The tension builds as we change from plotline to plotline and the ending seems unpredictable. Is Fate set in its course or can it be changed?

The story could not succeed without a strong actress to drive it. Christina Ricci's acting history goes back to the TV show The Addams Family. Her youthful, pretty looks suit the part well but her tremendous acting skill combined with Brian Gilbert's tight direction are what make the film a great work. Without them I think the film would be just another Hammer Horror film in spite of Anthony Horowitz' intelligent script.

The quality of the film is also helped by Gilbert's not allowing it to fall into the conventional splatter or horror genres – it may border on these but it is done with taste and style and doesn't cross the line.

I was rather surprised at the choice of an American for the lead role. In what is a distinctly British style of film Cassie sticks out, but I think now that this is what was intended – she is a

stranger to the village and its history, a traveller from foreign parts, and her accent highlights this.

I really enjoyed this film for its plot, quality production and intelligent story.

If you like suspense, try this one.



**Ice Queen
Imagine
Anchor Bay
R4 DVD**

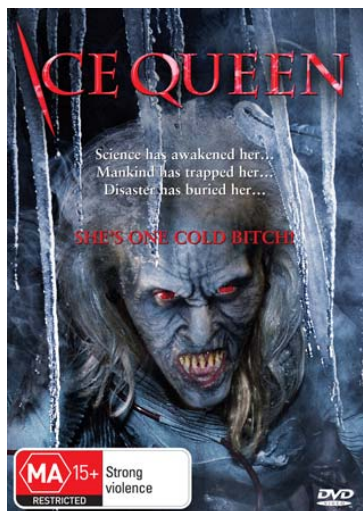
Ice Queen is a B grade horror thriller from MTI, distributed by Anchor Bay.

It is a difficult film to review as it is very much within the schlock horror category with very average acting, a ridiculous plot and some fairly tragic special effects. That being said I am a sucker for sci fi horror and there is enough that is unusual about the plot that made me stick with the film and even go along for the ride.

The plot involves the discovery of a prehistoric humanoid dating from the ice age. But this is not missing link or ape-man, she is a sexy young babe who must be kept below freezing point for her to survive, if she perceives you as a threat she transforms into the "Ice Queen" and drives her fist through your body turning you to ice from the inside. All she wants to do is kill and mate and she supposedly has the internal organs of a lizard !

Being a low budget film you don't see any of her more unusual attributes, they are mainly communicated in the dialogue between the scientists, still, she looks pretty good for a low budget horror creature.

Of course with such a truly momentous discov-



ery everybody wants in on the action. While she is in the hands of the military she is stolen and her body transported by plane to a secret location. Along the way, just as another double-cross is about to occur, something goes wrong with her life support system and she re-awakens – cold, hungry and very pissed off. You imagine thawing out after thousands of years !

The plane crashes into a ski resort below triggering an avalanche. Now the Ice Queen is in her element, a frozen wasteland, filled with prey ready for the picking.

Ice Queen is a strangely paced film, for the first hour we are primarily given a "teen" movie with a wet T-Shirt competition, partying, lots of tits and arse, a relationship crisis and lots of young dumb teenage boys saying "dude". It does set the stage for the later appearance of the Ice Queen but goes on way, way too long.

There is a lot of "background" in the film which fills it out including skiing action, avalanche shots and, of course, party action. While this makes the film look good it tends to confuse the tone of the film; is it a teen movie or a horror ? By the time the Ice Queen appears you are ready to scream, start killing already.

The CGI is not badly done for a low budget film with lots of explosions, action shots and then there is the Ice Queen. She is really quite a unique horror character and alone adds something of interest to what at times is a cheesy horror flick. For all its faults I enjoyed Ice Queen and it is definitely worth a rental.

The DVD includes a featurette on the making of the film.



Killing Ariel
2008
Farmhouse Films
MTI Home Video
R1 DVD

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

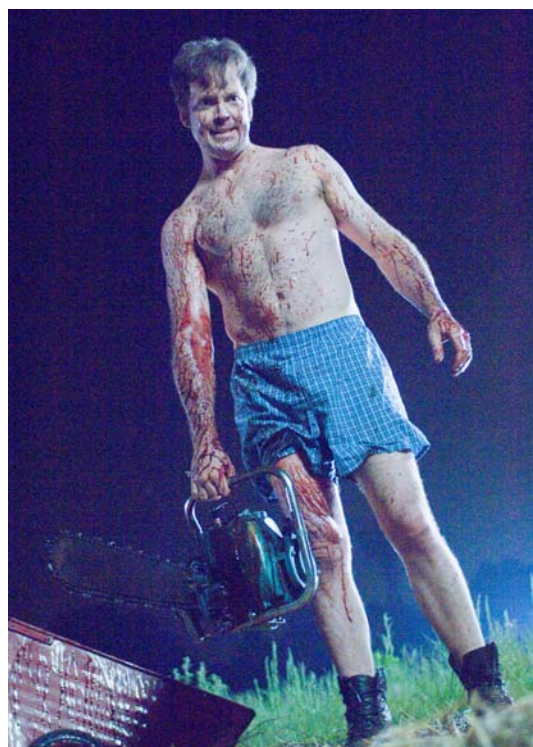
When he was a little boy Rick saw his mother having sex with a strange man who was in fact an incubus. Rick's father couldn't do anything about it as he was crippled by polio. The strange man killed Rick's father and mother and he was raised by his grandparents.

Twenty five years later Rick is married with a son and daughter and making something of his life. His life is going well until one night the demon returns to him while he is asleep.

"I could feel myself changing. I was dreaming twisted thoughts I never would have had."

While jogging in the mornings, he notices a girl named Ariel jogging along a similar path to his. This marks the start of some sort of midlife crisis. He buys a sports car and starts colouring his hair. One night he picks up the quite willing Ariel and takes her to his old family home for a weekend of illicit sex. She immediately seems to understand what happened in the house on the night his mother and father were killed.

Odd things happen to Rick that night – missing moments of his life come back to him, flashes of his wife in the house taking the place of Ariel. It culminates in what appears to be a mild heart attack. The next night the demon reappears. He



shoots it and finds to his horror that he has just shot Ariel.

In his distressed state he hallucinates that she is still alive, angry with him for shooting her. He is starting to realise that there is something seriously wrong, in spite of Ariel's glib explanations. He kills her again. And again. And again.

Ariel is the demon in human form and simply cannot be killed. She torments Rick just as her male form tormented his father and mother. Rick's life is starting to descend into madness, but he can't stop trying to find ways to kill her.

Michael Brainard plays the tormented Rick perfectly (and it's his first film) as the tension builds and Rick is tipped over the edge into madness. Axelle Cummings (Axelle Grelet) plays Ariel with just the right light-hearted touch until her real nature comes out, then she plays it as a nasty, spoilt little girl disappointed – a perfect touch for a demon who can't die.

Fred Calvert and David J Negrón have produced a fine piece of suspense here, with twists in the plot right up to the end. MTI Home Video is to be congratulated for selecting this independent film for distribution.

The DVD includes the usual "Making Of ..." and trailers.

Web: <http://www.mtivideo.com>



**The Last House on the Left
Extended Version
Roadshow 2009
R4 DVD**

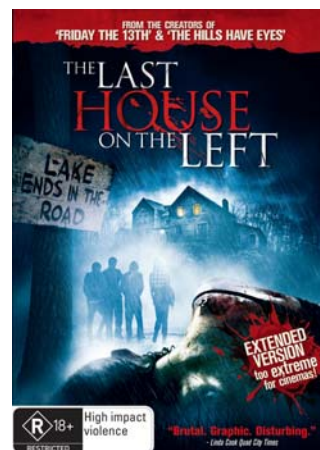
"To avoid fainting, keep repeating - It's only a movie...It's only a movie..."

The Last House on the Left was a controversial revenge film directed by Wes Craven and released in 1972. It was the film which began Craven's career and nearly single-handedly triggered the Video Nasty censorship debate. It was banned at the Cinema in Seventies in both the UK and Australia and was refused release on video in Australia. Its uncut Australian DVD release was only in 2004.

The problem with this response was that most critics believed it was a work of cinematic significance; violent, confronting and anti-social perhaps, but significant nevertheless. The way in which it explored how far a normal family could be driven over the rape and murder of their daughter was powerful and insightful. It really was the film's significance that overtook its controversial content and allowed it to be finally released on DVD uncut. It is interesting to note that Craven actually had a much more violent version of the film in mind, which he tentatively called *Night of Vengeance*. This was edited down to *The Last House on the Left* for practical considerations.

The 2009 version of the film while technically listing the producers as Wes Craven and Sean Cunningham is pretty well a production from Cunningham alone. The director is Dennis Iliadis. While the screenplay takes inspiration from the original it has been revamped by Adam Alleca and Carl Ellsworth. This does not mean Craven had no input, it is quite clear that the

original film was a major inspiration and many of the scenes translate "element for element", however, the 2009 version is a very modern adaptation; we must remember we are some 37 years from the original and the cinematic world is a very different place.



It is always difficult to compare a remake with what is considered a significant work of cinema. With the new release of *Last House on the Left* it is doubly so because the technology of cinema has moved so much further on since 1972 and explicit violence is far more permissible on screen. To really judge a film like this I think you must allow the new version to "speak for itself"; yes it is a remake and takes many elements from the original but it is a new vision and must be interpreted and experienced as such.

There are also some very major differences in plot, the central rape victim Mari survives and Justin (the main killer/rapist's son) is somewhat redeemed, representing a slight glimmer of hope. Too many reviewers have judged the 2009 version by the original which I think, in this case at least, is a major error. You should try to experience this film as a new work of cinema and if you then want to go back and see the original, do so afterwards.

Emma (Monica Potter), John (Tony Goldwyn), and Mari Collingwood (Sara Paxton) decide to go on vacation to their lakeside house. It is both

a relaxing and painful time as it seems that their son and brother drowned in the lake outside the house and it brings back many reflections memories. Mari leaves her parents so they can spend some time alone and heads into town to meet-up with an old friend, Paige (Martha Maclsaac).

While Mari has grown up, Paige is much the same, working in a small local store, smoking dope and generally going nowhere.



Justin, (Spencer Treat Clark), a cute young man comes into the store to buy chocolates and cigarettes, when asked for ID he convinces Paige to let him off in exchange for smoking some high quality weed. Mari and Paige go with Justin to a local hotel where Paige convinces Mari to join in with the fun and soon they are all suitably stoned.

Justin believes his family are not going to come back for quite a while, but since time flies when you are smashed soon his family returns. Krug (Garret Dillahunt), Justin's father; Francis (Aaron Paul), Justin's uncle; and Sadie (Riki Lindhome), Krug's girlfriend are not amused to find he has company.

Things soon turn nasty. Krug shows Justin a local newspaper that has Krug's and Sadie's mug-shots as the lead article and explains how Sadie and Francis smashed into a police car to break Krug out of police custody. (Which was the impressively powerful and visceral scene which opened the film).

Of course it is now far too risky to let the girls go and they are kidnapped and driven into the country side. Mari thinks fast and convinces Krug to take the winding road that leads them to her parent's lake house. Soon Mari sees her chance and attempts to jump from the car, a violent struggle ensues and the car crashes into a tree.

Krug is very pissed off, they have a crashed car, two kidnapped girls and a storm is coming. Sadie and Francis proceed to beat Mari and Krug attempts to teach his son how to be a man by forcing him to sexually abuse Mari.

Justin refuses to play and things go from bad to worse. Paige is stabbed and Mari is raped, as Mari tries to escape she is shot in the back and left bleeding in the lake.

The twist that comes next is what really makes this an intriguing film. A wild storm forces the gang to seek refuge with Mari's parents. Mari crawls home and they find her on the porch, at the same time Justin has left Mari's necklace on a bench to alert them to who their visitors really are.



At first they simply want to get to their boat and get Mari to a hospital before she dies, however, it becomes clear that the only way they can do this is to dispose of those who stand in their way. So begins the path of revenge.

Francis is killed first when he happens upon Mari. Emma shoots Sadie in the Head and Krug is knocked unconscious then given a paralyzing drug with his head left inside the microwave. (It is active and working without security as it was damaged by Emma's brother earlier in the film).

Unlike the original, Justin is seen as having some conscience and survives with John, Emma and Mari who take the boat to the local hospital.

This is a confronting film and many will find the violence (and medical procedures) a bit too much. John is a doctor, like in the original, but gets to use his skills in the 2009 version.

The sheer brutality of much of the film is confronting and I always have issues with rape revenge films. At the same time there is far less emphasis on the rape itself, than on the overall violence of the "gang" and the family's need to fight for their very survival. This examination of how far parents will go to protect their family is powerful and fascinating.

On this level it is very different from traditional rape-revenge films such as *"I spit on your Grave"*. The character development is solid and for a film where the monsters are all too human, it is a challenging work of cinema and worth watching.

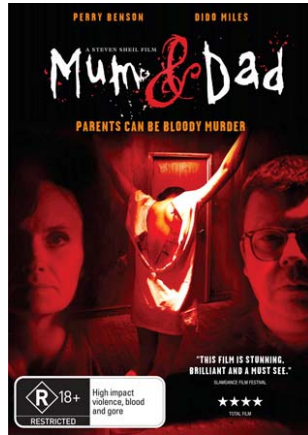
Mum and Dad Anchor Bay R4 DVD

Mum and Dad is a stunning, terrifying and confronting horror tale taking its inspiration from such killers as Ed Gein and the Gloucester serial killers, Fred and Rose West. It offers a cutting edge perspective of horror cinema, while it does include extreme violence, torture and sadism, there is a powerful psychological angle which makes it very different from the current trend in torture horror films.

Lena is a young airport cleaner who has recently emigrated from Poland. She has befriending by Birdie, a young girl at work, who seems to take a lot of interest finding out about her family and friends. Birdie is bubbly and friendly, but something just doesn't seem quite right. Birdie manipulates events so Lena misses her bus home and then invites her to come and have a meal and meet her parents.

When Lena arrives Birdie and her brother Elbie vanish off into the house and soon she is drugged and chained to a bed. She awakens to the reality of her new life. Mum and Dad are violent psychopaths living as an average working class couple and she is their new daughter. Dad likes to sexually abuse and torture his victims before dismembering them and using their goods as a source of income. Mum likes to cut and torture her children and only protects them from Dad if they fulfil her every whim and fancy. Birdie and Elbie are the "adopted" children of the couple, but many others have not made the grade including one reduced to being a near vegetable, but kept alive in the attic as an occasional plaything for Dad. Dad must be regularly placated and if you try to escape you will pay a very dear price.

The film, as would be expected, is packed with torture, gore and violence but this is not really the most disturbing element, it is the portrayal of dysfunction and madness which really puts you on edge. The violence, however, is extreme, from torture, cutting and sexual abuse, to dismemberment and a Christmas tree that has to be seen to be believed.



As the tale progresses we come to experience the infighting of a truly insane family as they go about their daily chores, albeit of a serial killer type. Some keep and wash the victim's clothes, Elbie packs the body parts in bubble wrap and buries them and so on. It becomes more and more bizarre and unnerving as the film progresses, until, at last, Lena has a chance to escape.

The psychology of *Mum and Dad* is what makes the film so disturbing. We have a simple working class couple who are also serial killers. The normal "dysfunction" is writ large, everything becomes disturbed and distorted. Mum needs to be placated and to feel wanted and Dad administers the discipline, but here it is ever so extreme. There is squabbling between the kids, but this time they are vying for their survival in a hierarchy which is based on sex and violence. They taunt and betray each other for affection, but the affection is laced with sex and violence yet loss of it may result in an early demise. Mum and Dad truly believe in the value of the family, but oh what a family it is. This is family values at its most sickening.

The play between madness and intense violence keeps you constantly on the edge of your seat. It is too easy for extreme violence to distance or detach the viewer in a jaded haze of gore, but here the intense horror is balanced with a strong plot, excellent character development and a perverse view of the family which makes it work all too well!

The acting is utterly superb, Mum and Dad (Dido Miles and Perry Benson) are so totally believable that you never doubt for a moment the authenticity of what you are watching.

This is a dark, gruelling and gut wrenching film which will shock and amaze, it is well worth the experience, if you dare.

**Edgar Allan Poe's
The Pit and the Pendulum
Director: David DeCocteau
Here/Regent Releasing**

David DeCocteau is one of a new generation of filmmakers who takes traditional horror tales and subverts them into something new and exciting. His style is camp, cheesy and erotic, but with a good dose of suspense and traditional horror as well. He eschews trends toward ultra violence and uses inference and suggestion to tell a good tale. His films are marked by beautiful women and even more beautiful men and while the old Hammer classics may have been filled with buxom babes, DeCocteau offers us sublime men and same sex love.

The Pit and the Pendulum DeCocteau style centres around the world of radical hypnotherapy. It seems Dr.Dimitri developed an unorthodox approach to his treatment of the mentally ill using pain experiments on the patients in the mental institution, Archway Asylum, that he had built for the purpose. He believed that if he pushed his patients to their pain thresholds and beyond, while under hypnosis, they would be immune to pain in real life. Sadly he pushed many of his patients too far and they died in the process.

Now his daughter JB Divay is advertising free sessions to those who wish to experiment with a new form of hypnotherapy. A group of sexy young woman and men apply, each with their own goals and desires. They range from Trevor and Vinnie, the strapping but IQ challenging wrestling champions, Alicia, who has come to investigate the clinic and Julian, narcissism, self centred and a weight lifter. There is also Gemma, a naïve yet lovable diver, Jason the long distance runner and Kyle, the storm



chaser. Of course as the tale unfolds all manner of personal relationships develop and we are treated to more than a few sublime young male bodies, including a rather hot wrestling scene !

As JB explains her methods and they note her obsession with time, having clocks in every room of the house, she claims she is very different from her father. Yet we come to realize she has her brother tied and gagged in a chair in her study. It seems he is a failed experiment from their father's time at the Asylum, not only is he not immune to pain but is hypersensitive to even the slightest stimulus.

As JB begins to undertake her experiments the students start to disappear. At first Julian, but this can be overlooked as he argued with his girlfriend, but as more and more of the students go missing it seems JB is trying to achieve a goal from which only the most fit will survive.

This is an intriguing and captivating re-envisioning of The Pit and the Pendulum, it is fun, erotic, campy and yet suspenseful and atmospheric. It has a great house as a backdrop and has a real sense of style. It enjoyed it immensely.



Let the Right One In
R4 DVD
Madman
Entertainment

Swedish Audio with clear sub titles.

If you are a little sick of traditional vampire stories, then you will find this tale a revelation. It is marked by a uniquely European style with lush cinematography, superb character development and a bleak sense of mood. While the vampire motif is certainly central to the film, it also places a strong emphasis on the nature of child bullying and the power of first love.

12-year-old Oskar (Kåre Hedebrant) has a difficult time, his parents are divorced and he spends his weekends between his distant mother and his father. His school life is painful, marked by isolation and bullying.

He only dreams of revenge and collects crime stories in a scrapbook and practices with a knife stabbing the air screaming "Squeal, Piggy!" hoping one day to have the strength to confront those who push him around at school. He has no friends and plays alone.

One night he sees a girl and an older man move in next door. They immediately board up the window in one of the rooms and seem to keep to themselves. One night when he goes out to play he meets the very pale Eli. She keeps her distance and announces that they cannot be

Eli and Oskar



friends. Soon, however, her resistance is worn down and before you know it they are communicating by Morse code through their shared bedroom wall and seeing each other every night.

Oskar is so taken with Eli that he doesn't take notice of the events which are shaking his neighbourhood. A blood drained body of a young man has been found in the forest hung by its feet with his throat cut, people are going missing and soon a local woman explodes into flames after being bitten on the neck by a child.

The term "Let the Right One In" refers to the European folklore belief that a vampire cannot enter your home without an explicit invitation. This is vividly illustrated in the film when Oskar dares Eli to come into his home uninvited and she begins to bleed from every orifice until Oskar, rightly horrified, gives her the invitation.

This is an unusual film in that it interweaves a "first love" story with related themes of childhood alienation and bullying with a powerful vampire tale. There is also a lot of "texture" to the film with fascinating characters, such as the old man who looks after Eli who will do anything to help her, including kill. However as age catches up to him he botches one too many killings and so uses acid to make him unidentifiable (and hence protect Eli) and let's himself get caught.

The scene where Eli goes to the hospital and kisses him goodbye, drinking his blood and letting him fall to his death is both brutal and touching at the same time.

This is really quite refreshing look at the vampire mythos. While it retains many traditional elements, ranging from sleeping in coffins to being allergic to daylight, it adapts them in a new and innovative way. This is a gothic film successfully moved through time to modern Sweden ! The bleak and cold look of the gothic film is here evoked by the fields of snow and the darkness of the night.

While there are some superb horror elements, I especially like the carnage brought by Eli against Oskar's tormenters at the end of the film, the focus is really on the unique love between Oskar and Eli. One can only hope she makes him a vampire and they live together for eternity.

Martyrs
Kojo Films
Gryphon Distribution Australia
R4 DVD

Martyrs is truly a unique experience. It is harrowing, confronting and visceral. It is often difficult to watch and hard to bear yet it keeps you glued to the scene though you are shocked, if not horrified by what you see. Many people will find this film too much to handle, its themes are powerful and confronting, its violence graphic and the underlying psychological motifs deliberately provocative.

In my mind this all adds up to a truly awe inspiring work of cinema; it may not be easy to watch and it is not enjoyable in the traditional sense of the word, but it challenges in the way that true "at the edge" cinema should do.

When the film was presented at film festivals during 2007, many viewers walked out and it is rumored some even threw up in the aisles. Whether this is true or simple hype, I wouldn't necessarily be surprised by such reactions as this is an extreme film. At the same time reviewers who denounced this film as torture porn are doing the director, Pascal Laugier a grave disservice. The term torture porn should be understood in relation of the second word in the term, porn. Porn is the display of biological functions without context.

This is the difference, in my books anyway, between erotica and pornography. Torture porn is a modern trend, primarily in US horror films, which uses extreme violence including torture and mutilation purely for effect without much

context or plot. Martyrs is exactly the opposite to this. It is one of the first films I have seen where I believe every piece of extreme and sometimes brutal violence (and there is a whole lot of it) is justified by the plot.



This is a film saturated with meaning. Just some of the themes explored include the effects of abuse and torture, self mutilation, psychosis and mental illness, religious and political extremism and even love and affection between those damaged by their life experience.

Laugier deliberately leaves the true meaning of Martyrs undefined and you can read the film in many different ways. On one level it is an exploration of how far religious extremists will go to achieve evidence of life after death, on another the stupidity of valuing suffering and pain over accepting life as it is. The crux seems to be the speech given in the middle of the film where martyrdom is extolled as a virtue and all manner of torture and suffering used to justify achieving "transfiguration". While the organization which coordinates these "experiments" is not named, its use of the term "transfiguration" (a Christian term used within mysticism) and its emphasis on young girls being the best subjects seems to hint at Roman Catholicism.

Lucie haunted by her "dead girl"



At the same time the breeding of martyrs could equally be applied to certain sects of Islam. In any event it is a fairly sustained attack on the fanaticism that results from emphasizing a supposed life after death over this one.

Within the context of this larger picture, which really only becomes clear half way through the film, there is an exploration of the horrific effects of abuse. For the first 50



Martyrs is saturated with images which will haunt you for a long time

minutes of Martyrs we experience the truly harrowing suffering which Lucie is going through trying to find those who abused her and bring them to justice.

During this period Laugier sustains the mystery as to whether the cuts, bruises and violence visited on Lucie's body are the result of intra psychic psychosis (within her mind) or caused by a dead girl which is haunting her. The effect of her psychosis is heightened when we juxtaposition it to the plight of Anna who truly loves Lucie and tries to help her but realizes their lives are dangerously out of control.

Lucie brutally slaughters a family as she believes the husband and wife were her captors, Anna is not so sure. Lucie's inner torment becomes so extreme that she inflicts all manner of abuse on herself, scenes which are uncomfortable and painful to watch.

This is when the film begins to switch gears and it is a testimony to Laugier that he is able to move between what at first seems to be a revenge film to something altogether more frightening. Lucie loses control when she realizes Anna does not believe her and believing that the dead girl is trying to kill her actually kills her, a sad and harrowing end to her life.

Anna finds a hidden laboratory under the house and must confront the pain that her lack of belief has led Lucie to kill herself.

The scene where she begs Lucie's dead body forgiveness is tragic and moving.

As Anna explores the basement she confronts a further victim but in such an extreme state that she cannot help her. She also comes face to face with the mysterious organization behind it all.

We start to get an inkling of what they want as they extol the value of martyrdom and suffering. Soon, however, Anna will know firsthand what they are explaining as she becomes the focus of their experiments.

The scenes of torture and abuse now become quite overwhelming. While they are certainly justified in the context of the story they are hard to watch. It would be fair to say that if these scenes did not have any meaning then we could criticize the director for using gratuitous violence, however, they do lead somewhere.

The ending is astounding and leaves us pause to think. The way in which a range of themes are interwoven together to create a challenging and thought provoking film is impressive. The acting is superb, the score is haunting and the cinematography excellent.

There are little things which have such an effect such as the fact that the "normal" family living an average life upstairs with their kids, one of which is a local swimming champ, at the same can rub a torture den downstairs all in the name of some form of extreme ideology. It is superb depiction of how an extreme belief can change outwardly normal people into monsters.

I consider Martyrs a masterful work of cinema; it explores a range of intriguing and provocative ideas in a way that literally kicks you in the guts. It is one thing to contemplate issues relating to abuse and the effect of ideology theoretically, it is another to have it seen through the eyes of its helpless victims.

This is courageous filmmaking and if you are willing to take the journey you will be rewarded, but it will not be an easy ride.

Nightmare (1981)
Romano Scavolini
Trash Palace (DVD-R)

Nightmare, released in the UK as *Nightmare in a Damaged Brain* has a serious history of censorship. It was one of the major titles focused upon in the Video Nasty debate in the UK and banned accordingly. It has never been released in the US or Australia on DVD. There were two Australian video releases prior to the censorship purge of "Video nasties" *Schizo* ran 89 minutes and has pretty well all the violence removed while an uncut edition (100 minutes) under the title *Nightmare* was released by Video Classics.

We are lucky enough to have a DVD-R copy of *Nightmare* from Trash Palace and I must admit this is a perverse little gem. It is so over-the-top that Tom Savini, who is credited with the special effects, has denied that he worked on the film at all ! Savini being the special effects wizard that he is has made this a real gorefest, it is ridiculously violent with all manner of close-up and very realistic slaughter.

The film itself is marked by a strongly voyeuristic feel; the camera watches everything as though it is a peeper. From the sex rooms where you pay by the minute to watch women in all sorts of activities to bedroom windows; you see what the killer sees through the lens of the camera. You will certainly feel dirty after watching this one !

The film opens as an unnamed man is having a nightmare; he awakens to see some blood on his leg and throws back the sheet to find the bed covered in blood, guts and a severed head. The head opens its eyes, he screams and screams again and we realized his name is George Tatum and he is in a hospital for the criminally insane. It seems George was jealous of his father having a good time so decapitated his father's mistress and drove an axe through Daddies head.



George has been the subject of a new experimental psychiatric treatment using a regime of cognitive therapy and a plethora of untested drugs. He is given a clean bill of health and allowed to go on a preliminary journey back into the community as long as he reports to his psychiatrist the next day.



George makes a b-line for the sleaze of downtown New York City and becoming over stimulated by the sex on show begins to regress into psychosis. As one would expect, he does not return for therapy and goes AWOL.

It seems that while the psych team had tested George in all manner of ways they did not take into account the power of his uncontrollable sexual drive. Soon he is slaughtering with abandon including slitting throats and "penetrating" a dying woman with a knife. All this is interspersed with flashbacks to his childhood and the primal event which started it all. The mixture of his rampage of violence, childhood psychosis and nightmarish hallucinations create a very dark vision, it is superbly edited to give the film a truly "schizophrenic" look and feel.

George flees to Florida and begins to stalk a single mother and her kids. There is a fascinating sub plot here as one of her children seems similarly disturbed to George and as the film ends, it seems the baton of psychosis is passed onto the next generation.

This is certainly a wild journey into madness mixing voyeuristic cinematography, lots of sexualized violence and some astounding special effects. The acting is equally impressive, Baird Stafford as George Tatum is uncomfortably convincing, this is not just a wild slasher film but a dark trip into the mind of a sexual psychopath. While many treat *Nightmare* as a slasher, I tend to place it more within the Giallo genre. It has a bizarre plot, superb character development and offers a lot more than one normally gets from a traditional "slash and dash" film. The DVD-R from Trash Palace is of good quality and even includes the original trailer.

Web: <http://www.trashpalace.com>

Not Forgotten Anchor Bay Entertainment R4 DVD

Not Forgotten is an intriguing cross genre film which mixes together elements of the supernatural, horror and a suspense film. The background to the movie is within La Santa Muerte, a cult which brings together Catholicism with Mexican indigenous ritual practices. It is focused on La Santa Muerte (The Holy Death) who is understood to be the saint for revenge. It is a tradition unique to towns along the United States Mexican border. It has its own unusual practices, priesthood and practitioners and is certainly not considered orthodox by the wider Catholic community.

Simon Baker, who normally plays more mainstream roles, is impressive as Jack Bishop. He seems to be a dedicated father, respected in his local community and well loved by his second wife and daughter. His daughter believes her mother died when she was young and the only trouble the family seems to have is minor "coming of age" issues.

However, Jack is not what he seems, he used to be a hit-man for crime syndicates connected to La Santa Muerte and undertook many brutal murders on their behalf. After years in their pay he took his daughter and constructed a new life but now the past has returned and his daughter is missing.

The first section of the film is nicely constructed with glimpses of the strange cult and the depiction of Jack as a bewildered man who has lost his daughter. Slowly, as clues mount, you know something is not quite right but are not sure exactly who is responsible.

Has Jack's daughter been kidnapped by a sexual predator? Why does Jack pretend he

doesn't know Spanish and yet occasionally his knowledge slips? What about the prostitutes who all seem to know him but he pretends he does not know them?

The intrigue is well played and for a long time you are not sure if this is a supernatural or crime thriller. As you come to understand Jack's background the pace (and violence) of the film increases as he returns to his old ways in a desperate search for his daughter. The ending is not expected and a superb twist.

This is an extremely well directed film which uses an unusual cultural background to great effect; the mysterious imagery, the blending of indigenous and Catholic elements, psychics and occultism all throw you off the trail of what is essentially a tale of murder and revenge. The cinematography is excellent using constant long and slow shots to create a world in which everything is a potential threat and no one is quite what they seem. Simon Baker is very accomplished in the lead role and the way he transforms from "family man" to violent killer who will do anything to get his kid back is superbly portrayed. The scene where he tortures a suspect with broken bottles will have you cringing.

This is a the directorial debut from Drur Soref who also wrote the script with Tomás Romero, you will find it a intriguing, challenging and rewarding work of cinema.



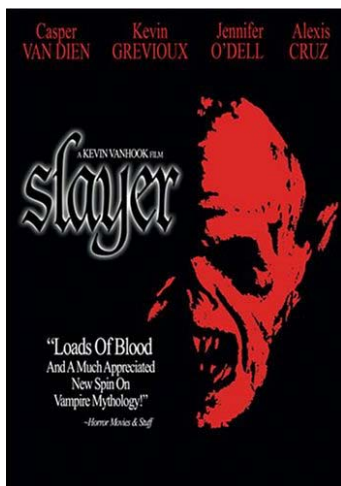
Slayer (2006)
IDT Entertainment
Anchor Bay
R4 DVD

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

This is a pretty good updated vampire film. They have finally got away from the gothic look and tried a bit of originality in the plot. This time the vampires are descended from an ancient tribe that existed before the Incas and the Spanish invasion of South America. They were content to live off wild animals but are now being driven out of their traditional deep Amazon forest hunting grounds and have moved into settled areas.

Rather than living quietly on the fringes of civilised areas they are now slaughtering entire towns and villages. A small force of U.S. soldiers has been sent in to help the government pacify the area. They soon find that the native tale of vampires is true, and one by one they are either captured or converted.

A rescue group quickly runs into the same problem and it becomes a battle between superhuman vampires and well trained military. Although the vampires are quite happy in daylight, the other traditional traits are there, like killing them with a stake through the heart. It is nice to see a vampire film where the action isn't con-



cealed in dark rooms or night time. It gives the film a fresher and surprisingly more believable look.

There is as much blood as you could want, the plot and script are not too corny, and overall it's a well-made film. If I have to find a criticism it is that some of the actors didn't seem to have their heart in it and gave fairly ordinary performances in spite of director Kevin VanHook's otherwise good work. VanHook also managed to avoid the temptation to stick footage of colourful parrots and massive jungle trees all through the film. We know it's in the Amazon rainforest, we are told this fairly early in the film, so he has got this out of the way and gone into the action.

He also managed to make the film without too much reliance on special effects, which somehow makes the film look more natural than, say, Blade.

Slayer is not a great film but it's not too bad. The blood content is high as is the action levels. The defects are fairly minor. If you think it's time to watch another vampire film, try this one.

War Wolves
2008
Peacock
Entertainment 2009
R4 DVD

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich



A platoon of U.S. soldiers patrolling a village in the Middle East was ambushed by insurgents. During the gunfight they were warned by a local woman that they should not anger the "dogmen" in a house across the road. In spite of being armed and well-trained the soldiers, both men and women, were attacked one by

one by people with superhuman speed and strength. Although badly savaged they were not killed, but were infected with a werewolf virus.

Now the soldiers have all been demobilized and have tried to forget what happened - unsuccessfully - as they have developed similar werewolf abilities themselves. Another small group of ex-soldiers are hunting the survivors, and they will kill them if they can before the entire United States is contaminated. The werewolf ex-soldiers are fighting back with their own hit squads.

One of the infected soldiers, Jake, is battling alcoholism and has not completely changed to a werewolf yet. He is being sought by both sides. Now he is recovering and the disease is becoming active. Erika, a girl in one of the small werewolf groups hunting him, is an ex-girlfriend and still has some feelings towards him. The other two girls in the group tend to follow Erika's belief that they can coexist with normal humans. "Our survival does not have to mean their demise". Her two girlfriends feel Jake would be better dead before he chooses sides, however, since he was the strongest of the soldiers. There is another male werewolf group that fully believes in the superiority of the werewolf. To them, humans are animals, just food. They see Jake as a potential threat who must be destroyed. As the change takes a stronger hold on Jake he must decide whose side he is on. He will soon be forced to fight one side or the other since he is becoming less human each day.

The old soldiers hunting down the werewolves are becoming no match for them. The werewolves are becoming stronger and more numerous and there is only so much a couple of elderly men can do. They have unlimited help from the military who do not want word of the were-

wolves to get out, but they can only supply equipment - they do not want more soldiers becoming werewolves. The old men are slowing down and some of the werewolves are escaping their carefully-prepared ambushes. Even by taking on the werewolves one at a time they are becoming outclassed by the werewolves' superior physical abilities.

The film is a fairly conventional werewolves-take-over-the-world story, saved from being ordinary by some quite good action and acting and a concentration on plot rather than gore. There is even room for a little comedy as the local Alcoholics Anonymous group takes up arms (tennis racquets and cricket bats) against the werewolves.

I have to say, though, that the film is a little patchy. It starts promisingly enough with the war scenes beautifully done. It then degenerates a little and takes on a low-budget look. Director Michael Worth has done a pretty good job but it is sometimes hard to tell who is the hero. We have John Saxon playing the ageing soldier Tony Ford particularly well, and against his strong character Michael Worth (playing Jake, as well as directing) is a bit lost. The three girls (Natasha Alam as Erika, Kristi Clainos and Siri Baruc) also have strong roles. Even the venerable Adrienne Barbeau turns in a top performance in her inadequate part. Perhaps the problem is just too many good actors

and not enough story for them to work with? That is not to criticize the film, but perhaps a little more money would have allowed each character more time to develop. That's the problem with low budget films, I guess.

This is a better than average film in spite of the minor deficiencies. Good acting can always make up for lack of money. If you like werewolf shows, try this one.

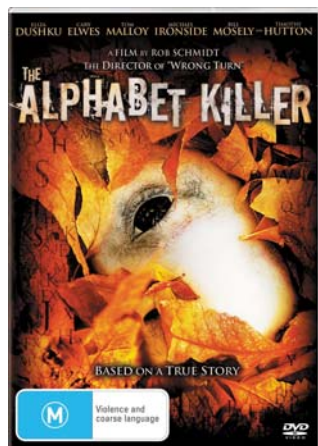


CINEMA & DVD



The Alphabet Killer Sony R4 DVD

Director Rob Schmidt appeared seemingly out of nowhere some five years ago with *Wrong Turn*, a film that took horror lovers by surprise with its intriguing plot and visceral content. Sometime later he followed it with *Right to Die* episode in the *Masters of Horror* series, which offered a seriously twisted look at the Euthanasia debate.



The *Alphabet Killer* is a major change of pace but he still continues to shock and amaze in equal amounts.

Schmidt has taken the story of the unsolved Rochester Alphabet Murders and run with them creating a modern day detective drama. While this could have been just another "serial killer" film; and they are a-dime-a-dozen these days, Schmit takes a creative approach to his main character and this makes all the difference. Eliza Dushku plays Megan Paige, a highly talented but eccentric and obsessive detective who pushes herself too far and has a breakdown. She begins to see the ghosts of the dead victims and is haunted by her inability to solve the case, after a severe psychotic break she ends up hospitalized.

She returns to work in the records department after having lost her relationship with her policeman partner and her reputation (cops don't seem to understand of mental illness). While relationship may be over, her partner is now her boss and makes the surprise decision to allow her to be an "advisor" when another Alphabet killing occurs. This becomes more complicated when trigger happy

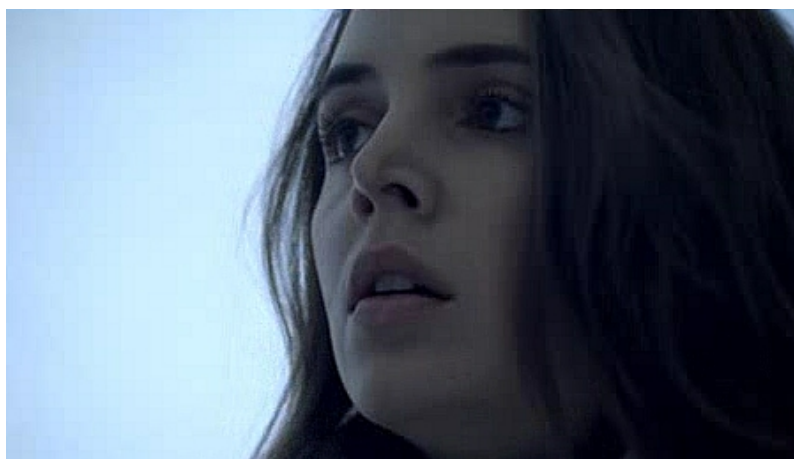
police shot an unarmed suspect and her testimony, while credible, is not taken seriously.

The power of her performance makes this a superbly character driven film. At the same time we have lingering doubts about whether she really is mentally ill or experiencing other worldly pleas from the deceased girls. Regardless of how we interpret them, their appearances add an ethereal look to the film. This exploration of mental illness and macho police culture adds a further dimension to what is primarily a procedural detective police film.

What is interesting about the presentation of the film is how restrained it is. In the days of *CSI*, *Law and Order* and *NCIS*, all of which constantly show autopsies and seem to push the shock element on a regular basis, *The Alphabet Killer* is surprisingly gore light. To be honest I find this a refreshing change, it allows the horror of the murders to stand by themselves without the need to splatter them across the screen.

The character driven nature of the film is continued in the supporting roles which include Cary Elwes of *Saw* as her boyfriend, Michael Ironside as a very territorial cop from an adjoining

*Eliza Dushku as Megan Paige makes
The Alphabet Killer a character driven film*



police region, Bill Moseley as a sex offender and Timothy Hutton as a counsellor living with mental illness. All of these performances create a film which is intelligent and intriguing.

The ending is the most difficult aspect of the film. The way Megan ties the killings together works, but the way it is set up for a possible sequel is a bit obvious and doesn't do the quality of the performances any justice.

The Alphabet Killer, in my mind, has a lot in common with the Giallo films of the Seventies and Eighties. It has lots of characters, unusual twists and turns, police corruption and a killer who comes right out of left field. It is certainly worth watching.

Butterfly Kiss Second Sight Films R2 DVD

Beginning his career working in British television before moving into features, with three of his films *Welcome To Sarajevo*, *Wonderland* and *24 Hour Party People* nominated for the Palm d'Or at Cannes, Michael Winterbottom is one of the most consistently provocative people working in cinema today. Astonishingly prolific, he has been the darling of the arthouse scene as well as a popular and mainstream director.



He has made sixteen films in the last thirteen years and his debut film, *Butterfly Kiss* was his stunning albeit explosive debut onto the large screen.

"I've looked all up and down these roads for someone to love me"

Eunice is (Amanda Plummer) is just a little obsessed. She travels the bleak motorways of Lancashire, moving from gas station to gas station searching for a woman named Judith. We never really understand her obsession, but we soon learn that she is deadly serious.

At each station she asks the woman behind the counter if she is Judith, if she answers in the negative Eunice kills them. That is until she meets Miriam.

Miriam is a rather lonely character, partially deaf, working in a dead end job, living with her disabled mother and not intelligent enough to better herself.

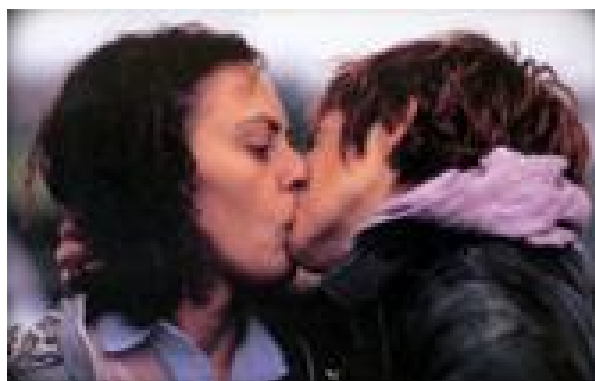
For some strange reason Eunice and Miriam are immediately attracted to each other. Rather than kill Miriam, Eunice seduces her and this is where we see the real Eunice; with all her chains, piercings and tattoos, a true outsider; angry, damaged and yet needing love and companionship.

When Eunice leaves, Miriam gives chase and becomes her companion, hiding the bodies and joining her in a wild journey of sex, murder and perhaps even love. Saskia Reeves does an excellent job as Miriam, who seems so much in need of love that she will put up with wild bondage sex and cover up all manner of carnage and violence.

She wants to see the best in Eunice and change her for the better but slowly she finds herself losing ground and together Eunice and Miriam become a strange and enigmatic pair.

This is a film you will either love or loathe. It is dark, at times very unpleasant and confronting. It is the story of "outsider" love, similar to that of bushrangers bonding together beyond the law. The deep and profound bond that they form together is not easily deciphered and this is the heart of the film; that a strange and eccentric love can form in the most bizarre of situations.

There are so many ways in which the film can be read, Eunice and Miriam are shortened in the film to Eu (You) and Mi (Me) and thus could represent the two sides of a woman traumatized by her life experience. On the other hand Judith has a certain resonance with the Old Testament Judith, an avenger who beheaded an enemy of the Israelites, in this case, a projection of Eunice justifying her violence as part of a search for her warrior self.



On a more superficial level it is a mixture of road movie, lesbian love story, serial killer tale, psychological drama and black comedy with awesome wild girl music along the way.

This is a strange film, enigmatic and eccentric; it will leave you with many questions and offers no conclusions.

What I especially like is that the filmmaker has suspended all judgment about Eunice and Miriam; it is up to us to travel the journey with them and make our own conclusions about the meaning, if there is any at all, to their lives and crimes.

The Cell 2
Reel DVD
R4 DVD & Blu Ray

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich

This film follows on from the 2000 *The Cell* with Jennifer Lopez although the plot has little in common. *The Cell 2* seems to be a rip-off of a successful film rather than a follow on. So how good is it?

The lead role of Maya is well played by Tessie Santiago. Maya was kidnapped and brutally tortured by a sadistic killer known to police as the Cusp Killer. His specialty is killing his victims then quickly reviving them so he can repeat the process in a different way. He keeps doing this until they expire or beg to die. To do this he uses drugs, electricity and suffocation. He made one mistake though – he left Maya for dead.

She recovered and the rush of chemicals each time she died has left her a curious legacy – when she is in contact with something of the victim's or the killer's, she can see what is going on or look into their memories. She has been trying to help the FBI track down the Cusp but her efforts failed. Maya has one big mental block – she cannot see the killer's face.

While in captivity she had a wooden box locked over her head. She

came to regard the darkness as her friend, because taking the box off and bringing her into the light meant more torture. The killer, however, seems to be more comfortable in the light. In spite of this Maya's inability to see his face means he has got away with it so far and Maya has become discredited in the eyes of the FBI.

Now a local sheriff's niece has been kidnapped and he will do anything to get her back. Reluctantly Maya agrees to help him despite the FBI's disapproval.

The killer is aware that Maya can get inside his head. It becomes a cat and mouse game between him and the policeman, using planted clues to make the policeman look guilty. Maya starts to understand the killer better and her help is enough for the policeman to start looking for a likely suspect.

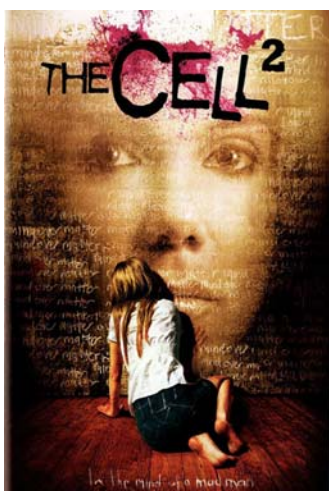
How can they succeed when the police are after them, the FBI does not believe her, and the killer knows her every move?

Maya is the only one who knows the Cusp well enough to find a weakness. Meanwhile the Sheriff's niece is dying repeatedly.

The film is good suspense although some of the pseudo-science is a bit less than credible. The acting is good and the only letdown is some gaping holes in the plot. Why, when they have the killer finally bailed up, does police backup not arrive? When cars draw up to his hideaway why doesn't the killer hear them? Why is the power still on in a derelict building?

These minor niggles aside, it's a worthwhile film with enough action to keep you on the edge of your seat.

[The torture box used by the Cusp in *The Cell 2*](#)



Company K
Waterfront Pictures Corp
Indican Pictures
R1 DVD
Web: <http://www.indicanpictures.com>
Web: <http://www.companykthefilm.com>

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

"I have watched the reactions of many men to war ... to pain, hunger and death... but all I have learned is that no two men act alike, and that no one man comes through the experience unchanged".

With these words writer William March introduces his story of his experience in France in World War I. He is represented in the story as Private Joe Delaney. Delaney's company is dreadfully unprepared for a real shooting war. A German aircraft swoops to machinegun the advancing troops. One soldier sees the plane coming and stands there in the open and says *"That's an aeroplane, isn't it?"* and dies. Delaney is injured in this first attack and he hasn't even reached the Front yet. The officers are no better trained or experienced, but they do believe the propaganda they read in the newspapers and in their ability to lead. One soon realises how false this is when he sends out a squad of men to dig trenches for a machinegun emplacement. He is warned against this by the company sergeant but he can't see that the Germans have the place marked for shellfire as soon as the Americans show any interest in it.

Delaney survives the trench warfare relatively unscathed but the psychological effects are building up. The film changes viewpoints from soldier to soldier as the story progresses, but Delaney is the common thread. He witnesses the murder of prisoners, the horrors of being stuck in the trenches for months, and the incompetence of his leaders. A crucial moment is when he is delivering dispatches through a contested forest. After the massacre of the prisoners he has sworn to God that he will never harm



anyone again, but when he comes across a lone German soldier his training takes over and he bayonets the man through the throat. This one act in particular will haunt his memories after the war and push him into nervous breakdown.



There is some camaraderie between the soldiers, who are really a pretty ordinary lot, each with their own weaknesses like greed and terror under fire. Under the ceaseless pressure and artificial atmosphere of war Delaney can make few true friends. It is a matter of sleep when you can, clean your weapons and wait for the next action. Because of this there is little room for development of the soldiers' characters. Director Robert Clem has used this to highlight the few moments of friendship that do occur. These are not always poignant – Delaney helps one of his friends to cover up the murder of an incompetent and vicious officer. Although following Delaney's story builds up our empathy for him, it is hard to do the same for the other soldiers.

Photography Director Alan Hostetter starts the film out in a bright, colourful style but gradually changes to the sombre lighting of the trenches, the woodland and the rainy weather. This as much as the direction adds to the overall depressing atmosphere and subtly changes the mood as we get deeper into the film. At the end of the film when Delaney returns to his old barracks for a visit, Hostetter goes back to the bright well-lit style. Now it somehow seems false and we can see the peeling paint and dreary surroundings of the military camp.

The film is not another *Band of Brothers*. It does not have the depth of personal involvement between the characters and it certainly does not have the budget. It is remarkable that so much can be done with so little money. *Company K* is nevertheless a very powerful war film and I would compare it favourably with that other classic of World War I, *All Quiet On The Western Front*. Yes, it's that good.

Extras on the DVD include the usual Director's commentary, a documentary on the life of author William March and trailers.

Door into Silence Severin Films R1 DVD

Door into Silence (1991) was directed by Lucio Fulci of *Zombie* and *The Beyond* fame, its executive producer was the infamous Joe D'Amato and the costume designer was Laura Gemser the dark beauty of *Black Emmanuelle*.



It was also the very last film directed by Fulci, so you may expect a very unusual horror film; instead it is strange exploration of psychological terror which is more like an extended episode of *The Twilight Zone*.

This does not mean it does not have its moments of intrigue and interest but just don't judge it by what Fulci has produced before.

The film stars John Savage as a Louisiana real estate tycoon named Melvin Devereux who we first meet at a funeral. The funeral is for his father and has quite a nice eerie appearance presented with an African-American funeral procession. Savage seems to be followed to his father's grave. Is it by a person, a force, even death? We won't find out until the very end of the film.

Soon a strange yet attractive woman Sandi Schultz, who became Savages wife sometime late) appears to be following him. He seems to know her but cannot remember from where. From here things get weirder by the moment with lots of strange nightmares and a rather nasty hearse which constantly harasses him on the road. There are lots of small little moments of madness which give a nice feel to the story.

The movie takes place on the lonely back roads



and towns of Louisiana; it is the empty and isolated countryside which creates such an effective mood.

Giancarlo Ferrando was the cinematographer and he also worked on *All the Colors of the Dark*, *Torso*, *The Suspicious Death of a Minor*, *Island of the Fishmen*, *A Policewoman in New York*, *Scorpion with Two Tails* and many others. He brings a real sense of desolation to the abandoned towns, dilapidated roads and bridges and countryside on show. Nature certainly is not beautiful here; it is lonely and vaguely threatening.

The sound track by Franco Piana is very jazzy and sometimes seems a little out of place but it does give the film an unusual soundscape.

For a while confusion reigns as strange events plague Devereux and nothing seems to make a lot of sense, but relatively early in the film we realize what is occurring and the rest of the film is simply a matter of being along for the ride.

It is a nice ride with some fun twists and occasional glimpses of that Fulci touch but don't expect any splatter or gore!

Severin presents the film in its original 1.33:1 aspect ratio. The image has been cleaned up nicely with an English mono stereo mix, which is very clear.

Invisible Target 2007 Roadshow R4 DVD

Reviewer:
Bob Estreich



This is generally a good action packed police show somewhat in the early Jackie Chan style, but without the showing off or inappropriate humour in the martial arts scenes. Director Benny Chan can turn in a good action film and does so in this one, but he lacks experience in the personal and plot side of the film. As a result this film lacks a little depth. The character development is a bit cursory until near the end and the plot seems incidental to the action scenes. As a result the fights dominate the film.

Fang, Jing Hau and Chen are trying to catch a gang of thieves who stage violent robberies.

One particular armoured truck robbery has killed the fiancée of one officer and he is out for revenge. Another officer's brother was killed by the gang leader. This young officer, played by Jaycee Chan, has probably the best role. Jaycee does a good job of the young idealistic cop and is possibly the most human character in the film. The others, while well played, seem a little more caricatured. Fortunately Jacky Wu Jing, playing the leader of the gang, does an excellent job of his role and it is his great martial arts skills and quietly understated evil presence that contrasts with Jaycee Chan's naiveté and saves the film from mediocrity. In spite of this there are still some cheesy moments such as when some of the gang members and cops reevaluate their lives in terms of good or evil right in the middle of an extended fire fight.

Overall the film tries to have the slick look of a Hong Kong equivalent of *Die Hard*. Fortunately it fails. There are the compulsory spectacular explosions, shootings, gunfights and extended martial arts scenes, as many as you could want, but the film manages to have a look of its own, not an American copy.

In spite of the weaknesses I thoroughly enjoyed the film. As a bit of escapist crime with an ethnic touch it is good viewing.

Man of Violence
Pete Walker
BFI
Blu Ray or DVD

This is another release from the BFI Flipside collection which makes available obscure and overlooked British films. *Man of Violence* (aka *Moon*) is a 1970 release from director Pete Walker and offers a superb gangster film set at the end of the Sixties when optimism was on the wane but Sixties swing was still in. While Walker is better known for his horror and exploitation films, *Man of Violence* and *The Big Switch* are fascinating and unusual films filled with great cinematography, nuanced plots and eccentric characters, never mind groovy clothing, swinging music and sexy woman !

In a world of gangs and villains, one man - Moon - will stop at nothing to get the girl and take the spoils. Moon is a cynical and seasoned

mercenary who works outside the law and beyond conventions. He is willing to do anything to solve a case including seducing both sexes along the way. While he is portrayed as a private eye working both sides of the law he looks and acts more like a "James Bond" character. He is an unusual spy/detective character who you cannot easily pigeon hole and is superbly played by Michael Latimer who really brings some panache to the role.

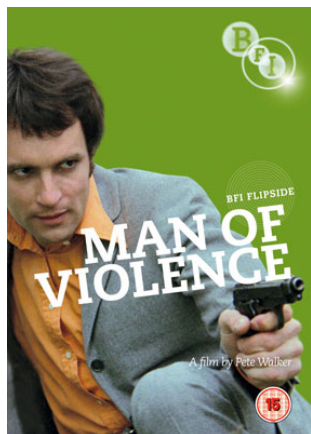
Starring Hammer girls Luan Peters (*Lust for a Vampire*, *Twins of Evil*) and Virginia Wetherell (*Doctor Jekyll & Sister Hyde*, *Demons of the Mind*), *Man of Violence* is a colourful journey to the underworld, filled with music, sex and double cross.

Moon is not quite sure who he has been hired by or what exactly he is supposed to do, but soon realizes he must steal 90 million dollars in gold from an Arab country decimated by political chaos. In this cross continent romp he must deal with double crosses, deception and lots of punch-ups. Moon has to contend with Burgess, who is a crook who poses as a cop and Nixon who is the criminal who poses as a policeman. Not to mention Sam Byrant the Northern industrialist with a dirty past and the racketeer Charles Grayson, who has a penchant for girls and lots of them. At the same time he is being trailed by a sadistic gay murderer!

The film is marked by a Sixties soundtrack, strange and quirky characters and lots of action. Walker is known for his "exploitation" genre touch and this film embodies a real flair, taking what is primarily a gangster film and turning it into something truly special. The fact that it acts as a time capsule of the Sixties seemly adds to its charm, I especially liked to gay club with its "*Boys in the Band*" style young men !

The quality of the high definition transfer cannot be faulted, it is absolutely perfect, the colours are bright and clear and the textures in the dimly light clubs and pubs are superb. This is an amazing edition of a rarely seen film.

Again, BFI offers real value with an added bonus of Pete Walker's thriller *The Big Switch* (aka *Strip Poker*), dating from 1968 and released in two editions. BFI includes both the domestic and alternative export edition which is 9 minutes longer.



Race to Witch Mountain
Disney 2009
R4 DVD
Science Fiction

Reviewer:
 Bob Estreich

You can easily be forgiven if you see this film as a grown-up version of E.T. It has all the characteristics of the earlier film – kids as heroes, likeable aliens, an evil government agency, and a reluctant Earthman hero. It also has a lot of the charm of E.T. and this, combined with Disney's undoubted skill at making a quality film, will ensure the popularity of Witch Mountain. Both this film and its predecessor *Escape To Witch Mountain* (1975) are based on an earlier book by Alexander Key.

The plotline is fairly straightforward science fiction and rather derivative. A spaceship crashes on Earth. An evil government body is looking for the occupants who turn out to be two alien kids out to save their home planet. The people of their planet have made such a mess of their ecology that they propose to invade Earth, believing their own planet is beyond hope.

The kids hope to prove this is not so by borrowing some of Earth's anti-global warming ideas.. Their parents have been imprisoned because of their opposition to the invasion. There's an ecological message in here that our future lies with our kids, but the point comes across without being laboured.

Their only ally on Earth is a rogue taxi driver who reluctantly becomes involved in their cause. He is helped by a female astrophysicist whose career is suffering due to her radical ideas. The little band is also helped by a huge group of eccentrics gathered at a science fiction



convention, who provide the comic relief. Although different members of the convention range from obsessed to funny, mercenary or demented, they are a harmless and generally amusing lot and they keep a light note in the film to offset the explosions and chase scenes.

The group must make it to Witch Mountain where the spaceship is being held in the usual high-security secret government installation (the U.S. must be saturated with these places). The baddies know they are coming. What is also coming is a Terminator-like android whose job is to kill the kids before they can get back to their planet with their message of hope.

The film seems to have a far higher action level than most Disney films but it's still recognisably a product of that company. It is quite acceptable for kids but is not so sickeningly nice that adults will want to give it up in disgust. I also like the idea that it's OK to be a scientist, as well as the notion that global ecology problems are not just for adults.

In this respect Disney films are taking a quite mature attitude to their young audience. They are no longer Snow White and cute deer, but are far more relevant to today's problems. In films like this they are starting to take a leadership role in forming or influencing kids' opinions.



COMEDY DVD



The Benny Hill 1970 Annual
Thames TV and Fremantle Media
Released in Australia by Roadshow
R4 DVD

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

In the beginning there was the BBC, and it knew what sort of radio and television the people of Britain needed. Unfortunately the people of Britain didn't agree and the British Government was pressured into allowing other TV networks to open. One such was Thames TV, which started in mid 1968. The problem with a new TV station is you have to find something to broadcast. The BBC was funded by radio and TV license fees, but Thames had to rely on good shows to attract viewers. It is to their great credit that they got it substantially right and, among other areas, made their mark in British comedy. Many of Britain's most influential post-WW2 comedians got their start at Thames including some of the immortal Monty Python crew.

An early recruit was a young round-faced comedian named Benny Hill. They took him from ATV, another network, and gave him a show in 1969. It was a standard "variety" format for the time – some short sketches, standup comedy monologues, funny songs and a visiting singer or group who could use a bit of publicity. His show had run on the BBC for thirteen years (32 shows) and for another three years on Associ-

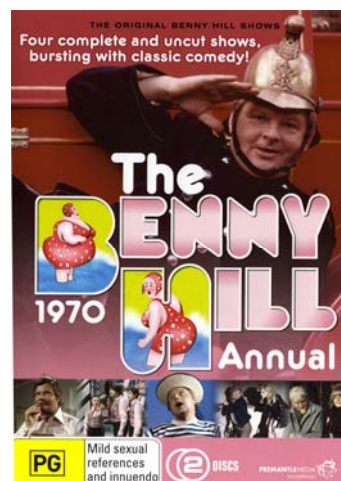
ated TeleVision (8 episodes and a special), but a certain amount of editorial control (censorship?) had not allowed the show to really blossom.

In this 2-DVD set we see some of Benny Hill's earlier work for Thames TV as the show settled into the format that lasted from 1969 to 1989. The first show is from 14th February 1970. The performance is still a little quaint but the characteristics that made the later Benny Hill shows are there – the risqué jokes, the standard supporting crew of Bob Todd, Henry McGee and Jack Wright, the high-speed puns and jokes and a quick swipe at Thames TV itself as represented by a very young Nicholas Parsons. This show also features one of Hill's early characters, Fred Scuttle, as a "program director" for Thames:

You must remember, sir, that most of our viewers are broken down by age and sex. Into categories, sir.

This also introduced "A Director's Nightmare", a reconstruction of the things that can go wrong on a TV show in the making. The segment proved popular and it was carried on through a number of further shows.

It all looked pretty low budget, mostly filmed in studio, but even in those early Thames days Benny Hill's genius showed through. Thames didn't exercise too much control and the result was a show that became one of the highest rating in Britain and even made the translation (somewhat edited) to the United States. The





final British show aired to more than nine million viewers.

Hill, who wrote his own scripts and songs, had a brilliant grip on the English language and loved the pun. Puns popped up regularly in his monologues, poems and musical items, as did almost unlimited double entendre and, unusually for those times, even homosexual references. As the shows gained more popularity the standard of the guests improved and an appearance on Benny Hill was sought after.

He was often criticised for the depiction of women as sex objects in his shows. His reply was that he did not treat them as sex objects but lampooned the people who wanted to see women as sexpots. His many female co-actors supported him in this. His staff were surprisingly loyal to him right through the show's long history.

Are Thames executives against attractive nude women?
Not as often as they'd like to be, sir.

As I watched the four shows I was astounded at the number of his jokes that are still current after all this time. Instead of standup comedy monologues Hill liked to recite poetry of his own writing. It was here that his true skills really showed.

*Ted meets this fancy piece in town
 And Ted don't hang around
 He's back inside her flat quick as a wink
 She starts to pour him a gin and then
 She says "now you just tell me when"*

He says "right after I finish that there drink"

In later shows he started to bring in a quick series of one-liners and brief skits to handle the jokes that didn't seem to fit anywhere else.

*Doctor: Don't worry, my dear.
 You haven't got Asian flu.
 You've got Egyptian Flu. You're going to be a mummy.*

By the show of 23rd December 1970 The Benny Hill Show had proved to be one of Thames' most popular shows, although he must have come close to offending many people many times. The show now contained more outside location filming (costly for a TV channel) and this episode featured A Tribute to the Lower Tidmarsh Volunteer Fire Brigade, a true piece of slapstick humour in the old music hall style that Hill so loved. It also featured, as part of a spoof on talent shows, what became his biggest hit in another medium. Ernie (he drove the fastest milkcart in the west) was a brilliant parody of the old western gunfight story between a milkman and a baker for the affections of a young lady. It was so popular that it was issued on record where it clocked up quite respectable sales.

*Now Ernie dragged Ted from his van and beneath the blazing sun
 They stood there face to face then Ted went for his bun...*

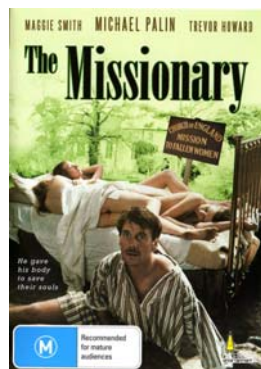
Hill tried to produce a special show each year. This DVD set contains the 30-minute 1970 special Eddie In August as an extra. It is a series of skits showing Eddie trying in vain to impress the girl of his dreams. It is a rather sad little piece, but in the end love (or lust) triumphs.

The show was still being aired as recently as 2004 and Thames is now releasing the shows in annual sets. So far they are up to the early 1980s. The DVDs are, let's face it, TV videotape quality. They could do with a bit of cleaning up perhaps but they are still quite viewable in spite of their age and they are still great fun to watch. It's worth putting up with the minor quality issues to watch one of Britain's greatest comics at work.

The Missionary
 1982, DVD release 2008
 Handmade Films
 Umbrella Entertainment
 R4 DVD

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

Of all the Monty Python crew, Michael Palin came across as the clean and innocently dimwitted member. These days he is mostly known for his series of travelogues.



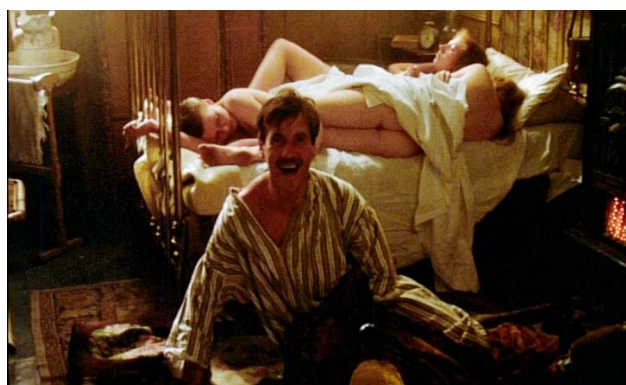
It will surprise many to know that in the gap between Python and the travelogues he also made a number of slightly smutty but wonderfully good-natured films which gently lampooned the British upper class of the Victorian era. Possibly his later series Ripping Yarns was the best, but this little-known film is the first he brought out after Python.

The Reverend Charles Fortescue has returned to England after ten years as a missionary in Africa. He is somewhat disappointed that he has been unable to teach the natives even the basics of English history such as the Magna Carta, but that doesn't matter.

He will finally marry his childhood sweetheart, the somewhat obsessive but well-organised Deborah. He briefly meets a mysterious lady (Maggie Smith) who will re-enter his life very soon.

The Bishop of London (Denholm Elliott) offers Fortescue a new job – a mission to the “fallen women” of the London docklands. He is not sure what this work will involve, but apparently the Methodists are doing very well at it and there is no reason why the Church of England should be left behind.

Fortescue finds a way to reach the girls of the street—but not the one the Church expected !



Lady Ames takes Fortescue under her wing

Fortescue will have to raise funds, buy a building, and, in the Bishop's words;

“Go among the prostitutes, Fortescue. Find out what they do, why they do it, and stop them doing it.”

In his fundraising efforts he meets the predatory and attractive Lady Ames, the mysterious woman he bumped into at the dock. She will arrange funds for the mission, but it is obvious that she wants some personal ministering herself. Although Fortescue is reluctant his fiancée persuades him to accept her help and the mission is opened.

It is unsuccessful at first, since Fortescue really has no experience of women. One young lady points out to him that “his lot just hates sex.” They don't know what it's about so they automatically disapprove. He then proceeds to learn more about it in the most practical way.

His personal understanding of the problem endears him to the local ladies and the mission becomes a success. His attitude now is that you mustn't confuse the sexual act with moral and spiritual values, an attitude which the girls exploit – working girls, servants, the lot.

Lady Ames catches him in bed at the mission with three girls and withdraws her funding. She warns him that if he won't help her change her life she will have to do it herself. The Mission is about to fall on hard times.

“Such was their regard for Fortescue that the inmates voluntarily decided to go back on the streets to raise money”.

The mission is now such a success that the other church missions are closing because they can't get the girls. .

His Church hears of his unauthorised activities and warns him that he must leave the mission and take a nice parish in the country or risk disciplinary action or worse. He also learns there has been an attempt on Lord Ames' life

It is his wedding day. Fearing the worst he pursues Lord and Lady Ames to Scotland where the Ames' are recovering from the near-poisoning. (and where Lady Ames also has a Scottish lover waiting). Can he keep the Faith? Can he stop Lord Ames being murdered? Will his marriage to the lovely Deborah go through? Will he be able to stay in the Church?

Although Michael Palin plays the straight man in the film the other parts are brilliant showcases for the skills of the supporting actors. There are wonderful little parts, such as Denholm Elliott's Bishop of London, and the butler who is perpetually lost in Lady Ames' house.

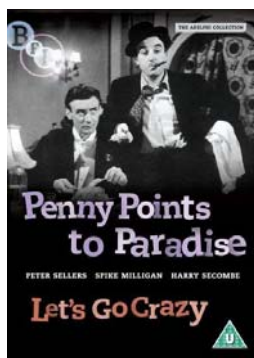
There are many memorable one-liners such as Trevor Howard's *"What is wrong with the country today is there aren't enough people chained up"*

This is a lovely low-key comedy that shouldn't offend anyone, but should give you a good laugh. It pokes fun at Victorian social attitudes and churches. The script is clever but not sarcastic.

I recommend it.

Penny Points to Paradise
1951/ 2009
Historical Comedy
British Film Institute
R2 DVD

Reviewer: Bob Estreich
Advance Films was a small family company run by Arthur Dent which began films from around 1946. In 1949 Dent acquired Adelphi Films as his distribution company. The demand for post-war entertainment was high and the company was able to produce a range of low-budget films at a time when the big U.S. companies were moving strongly into the British market. In the process Adelphi gave a lot of potential stars their start in film. Actors like Sid James, Ronny Corbett, Tommy Trinder, Diana Dors, Hal Monty and Joan Sims all appeared in their films. Penny Points To Paradise featured Peter Sellers in his first film role, and



this DVD is dedicated to his memory. He already had some radio experience in comedy work, but significantly in this film he was also teamed with Spike Milligan and a very young (and slim) Harry Secombe. This team went on to become The Goons, and radio's Goon Show became one of Britain's all-time great comedy shows.

Not that you would guess it from this film. Even Peter Sellers later admitted that it was pretty bad. The simple plot dealt with a Football Pools winner and the people trying to relieve him of his winnings. It was a series of slapstick gags and minor jokes with a bit of variety music hall thrown in. In spite of this, you can see the future Goon Show characters starting to develop in performances like Sellers' confidence trickster and Secombe's musical turns, as well as the atrocities committed on the English language..

"That's Harry. He's got the sponduliks"
"A most pernicious disease. the natives used to get it in their bazaars"
"Very nasty place to get it, sir"

There are also two historically significant bonus tracks on the DVD. Let's Go Crazy (1951) featured a number of music hall, variety and cabaret stars and bands, with Peter Sellers playing multiple roles at random through the shows. His skills at mimicry (later to come to fruition in his multiple characters in the Goon Shows) are evident in this short film. His impersonation of Groucho Marx is probably better than Groucho himself.

The other extra is The Slappiest Days of Our Lives (1953, 73 minutes). This film is a selection of clips from the early slapstick movies of the silent era, strung into a tribute to slapstick by Peter Sellers' voiceover. He carries off the multiple characters by his voice skills alone and once again his potential for the Goon Show's later performances is evident.

The last known copies of the films were stored in the garage of one of the Dent family descendants. From there they were recovered and restored by the BFI. They have done a superb job of rescuing these valuable glimpses of the British Film Industry. The DVD is accompanied by a booklet covering historical information, restoration notes and promotional material. For students and film historians it is a valuable package. For fans of British comedy it is just as valuable, and it is great to see such important work restored and preserved.

**Ready For This?
Tim Minchen
Madman Entertainment
R4 DVD**

Tim Minchen is an innovative Australian comedian, musician and poet. He combines stand-up comedy, songs with a unique sense of style and social conscience. He is unusual in that he is a stridently “secular” comedian, sending up religious pretensions and proudly espousing a scientific and rationalist worldview. As he notes, while this may be acceptable in the UK and Australia, in the United States this is about as risky as making jokes about “fisting”.

Ready For This? is a new show which include a few old favourites such as *Sarah*, *Canvas Bags* and the ever popular “*I Can Have A Darkside*” but otherwise has all new material. The show opens with a bang, in *Who Needs A Band?* Minchen uses his own voice through a Synthesizer to create a myriad of instruments and literally become his own band. It is a flamboyant and expansive way to open a show. Soon he moves to the piano and offers some excellent new numbers including some powerful critiques of both superstition and religion.

As Minchen has matured as an entertainer his focus on social issues especially science and religious has become more prominent. In these days of terrorism and fundamentalism, I believe that this makes his comedy not only relevant but quite unique. His humour does not just consist of ridicule or one-liners such as the amusing but limited anti-religious humour of Bill Maher, but offers informed and highly erudite discussions of evolution, science, sexuality, politics, feminism and related issues.

His song “*The Good Book*” displays an extensive knowledge of theology and the shortfalls of the supposed morality found in the Bible while his discussions of creationism shows he knows the subject well. One of the highlights of the show in this regard is his “*Nine Minute Beat Poem*”, this is really quite an astounding piece of performance poetry, beautifully polished with jazz accompaniment, it offers a witty but erudite dialogue between an ill-informed new age hippy and a well educated secular humanist with a solid grounding in science. It is not only extremely amusing but expresses the shortfalls of



assumptions made about “natural remedies” and “alternative health” and clearly outlines the scientific response to such fallacious thinking. It is not only rip-roaringly funny but educational and poetic as well, no mean feat !



Another powerful song is *Taboo* which explores the danger of using the “N-word” and while African-Americans may choose to reclaim it, it is the height of arrogance for whites to think they use it in a trendy and cavalier sort of way. It is a carefully worded song which later uses prejudice against “gingers” (Minchen has red hair) to help explore the issue in more depth. It is entertaining, informative and a biting piece of social satire.

There are also lots of personal reflections as well, such as a song to his wife Sarah and a fun number where he tries to balance his intellectual adherence to such high ideals as non objectification and feminism with his love of Boobies ! This playful ability to reflect on his own foibles always gives his shows a personal touch. This is continued in a *Song For Phil Daoust*, his raucous attack on a reviewer who gave him a vicious review when he started out in 2005 at the Edinburgh Comedy Festival, it is so extreme (he wants to tear flesh off the reviewers face and feed it to his children) that it is incredibly amusing. I hope he likes this review!

Ready For This? is musically accomplished and includes reflections on all manner of subjects from the exploitation of bears (we really shouldn't make them dance), to religion, science, the new age, feminism, sex and marriage. It really shows his development as a comedian that he can hold an audience for nearly two hours with nothing more than himself, a piano and some accessories such as a smoke machine.

The show did not falter once and I found myself wanting more, it ended with a nicely reflective number about a sentimental but secular celebration of Christmas.

Bravo Tim !

Review with Myles Barlow
ABC DVD
R4

While other critics waste time with trivial matters such as film, food or art, one man dares to review all facets of life – our experiences, our emotions, our deepest, darkest desires – to rate them out of five stars. So begins the story of *Review with Myles Barlow*, a dark, sarcastic and wickedly funny journey into social commentary and humour.



Barlow takes the everyday experiences of life and reviews them in a truly outrageous manner; he takes simple events and pushes them to an utterly absurd degree. Each episode is 30 minutes and includes two or three main reviews or stories punctuated with short reviews and a letter from the public. Each story is completed with a strange and complex review using the sort of language one would expect from an art critic. Each episode ends with what will be supposedly covered in the next episode, but never is. The DVD includes the first season of six episodes plus deleted stories, extras and a doco on Myles Barlow.

Review is incredibly witty, offering insightful social commentary with a cynical view of human nature. The series begins with stealing and shows its addictive qualities from taking a simple comb to becoming a full-on kleptomaniac. It is both extremely amusing and ridiculous at the same time, the concluding remarks are superbly crafted..

Stealing is a reprehensible, dishonest act of exhilaration and daring. And, like a staircase leading to the top of a never-ending lighthouse, it can quickly spiral out of control. The higher I climbed, the more giddy I became. And once I'd stolen the light bulb itself, I stumbled about in an orgy of Kleptomania as ships of moral decency came to grief on the rocks below. Embracing anarchy and ignoring morality became frighteningly normal causing me to chuckle callously at the poor shipwrecked sailors trying to clamber up the cliffs of consequence while I soared to freedom high above them on a hang-glider of corruption. Luckily for me, I was able to evade

punishment. But Krystal, if you do give in to this spine-tingling thrill ride and steal Renee's boyfriend, be warned that the pilfering may not stop there. Stealing is an iniquity of unexpected excitement, which is why I'm giving it three stars.



As the series progresses the humour becomes remarkably dark and at times potentially offensive. Murder is rated at half a star (he kills his newsagent who he thinks short changed him eighty cents) while heroism is given three stars even though he had to light the fire himself killing two people to rescue the remaining tenants ! The story on Voyeurism is especially perverse. It opens with a letter from a young boy asking Myles to request his mother to buy him a telescope to watch the stars. Barlow twists this to discuss the dangers of voyeurism. He tells his own tale of watching a reality TV program and becoming obsessed with a young contestant, Kelly. Soon this leads to stalking and being caught with his pants down in her wardrobe, a sad and harrowing review !

Other stories include a rip-roaring tale on divorce, the effects of having a dickhead for a friend and the dangers of self belief. The Self Belief story is especially amusing as he encounters a strange "religious movement" (I wonder which one) offering personality tests on the street. He soon believes he can do anything and attempts to swim to New Zealand; he can't wait to take the oysters of Auckland. He is dragged back from the ocean unconscious and only just survives with this life.

Review has developed a cult like following but originally was a hard sell. The networks couldn't really grasp the idea of reviewing aspects of life itself but when it went to air on the ABC it really caught on. The mixture of a serious academic like critic in the studio who throws himself wildly into real life situations to review them is high effective and incredibly funny. In the whole six episodes of series one there wasn't one dud review ! Awesome ! I give *Review* five stars !

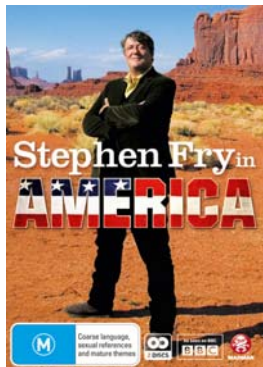
Stephen Fry in America
R4 DVD
Madman

"Above all, I love how America is constantly surprised at itself. You often hear an American say, 'Sheesh! Only in America!' in response to something weird, extraordinary, outlandish, exaggerated, pioneering."

Stephen Fry

Stephen Fry has a dry and incisive wit and offers a very different sort of travelogue. It has recently been shown on ABC and is now out on DVD. Due to a change in his father's career he was born in England rather than in the US and hence he takes this as a starting point to explore what his life may have been like if he had become a denizen of the United States. He takes his trusty London cab and drives through each state of America. In his typical laid back manner he narrates his journey choosing sites, attractions and people to visit according to his own personal whim and fancy. In some states he examines a range of fascinating locations, in others none at all. He skips right through Idaho, so surprise really. (What was that B-52's song? Ah yes: *"We're all living in our own private Idaho"*)

There is no rhythm or rime to his choices and this makes the show a fascinating and very personal view of the U.S. Sometimes we see major tourist attractions, other times minor sites, we visit everything from a "corpse farm" used to teach forensics to ghost town which has next to no inhabitants. We meet jazz musicians, shooters; stand up comedians, the rich and famous and the average man on the street. Fry pays particular attention to the multi cultural blend of the various States experience introducing us to the diversity of the American experience as seen



through the eyes of many different immigrant groups from the earlier Europeans to more recent groups such as the Mong.

Fry's dry wit makes the series especially enjoyable, rather than offering one-liners or a laugh-track, Fry offers a relaxed some sardonic commentary; sometimes biting, sometimes sarcastic, at other times sympathetic and even informative, but always entertaining. It is also rather fun to see a slightly rotund Englishman a bit out of his comfort zone as he goes shooting, fishing, out in a submarine and down a mine !

Stephen Fry in America is a 6 part BBS series which is 375 minutes. The DVD and Blu Ray releases come on two DVDs and includes footage not included in the television program. A five-part companion series, *More Fry in America*, has been commissioned for BBC Four; it will feature in-depth programs that were excluded from *Stephen Fry in America* because of time constraints.

In my mind the most endearing thing about the series is its unique tone. There is something very special about the understated nature of Fry's English humour. It is as though you have a very witty and refined friend over for dinner who shows you his home movies and along the way entertains you with a very funny and witty repartee. It is a real gem.



Steptoe and Son
Series Six
1970
Comedy
BBC
Roadshow Entertainment
R4 DVD

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

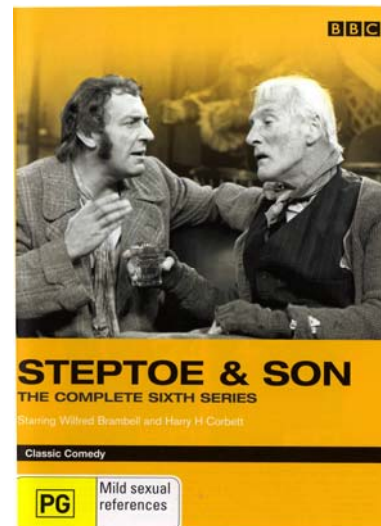
Steptoe & Son first aired on BBC TV in 1962 and with a five year gap in the middle it kept going until 1974. It is a typical British class struggle oriented sitcom that held its audience because of its brilliantly drawn characters.

The elderly Albert Steptoe (played by Wilfred Brambell) and his middle-aged social climbing son Harold (Harry H Corbett) are "rag and bone" men. These were the earliest recyclers, working from door to door collecting rags for reuse in paper, bones for fertiliser, and any scrap metal. Sometimes they would pick up second-hand furniture for resale, and there was always the dream of a "tickle" – the previously unrecognised antique that would make their fortunes. The work paid reasonably well for a skilled operator but it was regarded as low status.

Harold dreams of becoming better off and rising in the social scale. He describes himself as an antique dealer rather than a rag and bone man. His pretensions are held back by his father, who is comfortable in the old junk-filled home in the scrap yard. Albert is one of the old school who knows his place in society and takes a somewhat more realistic view of his son's chances of improving his lot. He is not above using cunning to keep his son at home, though – he confides in one episode that his secret fear is dying alone. There is genuine affection between the two, but sometimes Albert's personal habits (like using his false teeth to decorate the edge of steak and kidney pies) strains the relationship. This would inevitably lead to the series' catchcry, Harold's anguished "You dirty old man".

The formula is common in the better British comedies – know your place versus trying to better yourself – with the added poignancy of Albert's old age in a society where the care of the elderly was still left largely to relatives. The love/hate relationship is brought out clearly and you can't help but feel an empathy for the two main characters. Around this background writers Ray Galton and Alan Simpson wrote a series that captured British viewers and even led

to a dreadful remake, *Sanford and Son*, in the U.S. At its peak Steptoe and Son was captivating audiences of 28 million viewers per episode. It also spun off two films and a couple of Christmas specials.



The writers managed to turn out these superb shows without resorting to slapstick or innuendo, those classic British comedy standbys. In this they were quite different to, say, Benny Hill, who skilfully based his shows around these characteristics. The comedy in Steptoe and Son was in the situation, the conflict between the characters, and the light lampooning of those who would aspire to higher status.

Many episodes of the show were lost when the BBC cleaned out its archives and storage. This set has been compiled with the help of fans of the show who had copies put away. We owe a lot to these fans. The quality is often fairly poor, especially in the black and white shows, but as good as can be expected from such old videotapes. They are still quite watchable, although I would like to have seen attempts to clean them up a bit. The sound, fortunately, is still good.

The individual shows on this 2-DVD set are a good representative collection. They cover Harold's attempts to find love, his wish to move to a better house, their conflicts over local politics, and even Albert's illegitimate Australian son. In one particularly sad episode Albert finds love with a much younger woman and brings her home to meet Harold. To their combined surprise she is a face from Harold's past.

Non-British viewers – the review copy is in Region 4 PAL. Check that your DVD player can handle this.

I really enjoyed seeing these classic comedies again. It's a gentle form of humour that seems to have gone out of fashion, but in spite of its age the show still raises a good laugh.

3 Musketeers of the West
Dorado Films
R1 DVD
Web: <http://www.doradofilms.com>

3 Musketeers of the West (1973) a.k.a. Tutti per uno... botte per tutti is an entertaining spaghetti western which has not been seen on DVD before. A literal translation of the title is more accurately "All for One...Punches for All", I rather like that.

It is presented in both English and Italian and a fine job as been done on the print. It was directed by Bruno Corbucci (1931- 1996), who had a prodigious output as an Italian screenwriter and director. While his work was primarily in comedies (including spaghetti westerns), his major success was with the long-running "Nico Giraldi" series, which starred Tomas Milian as a foul-mouthed Roman cop.

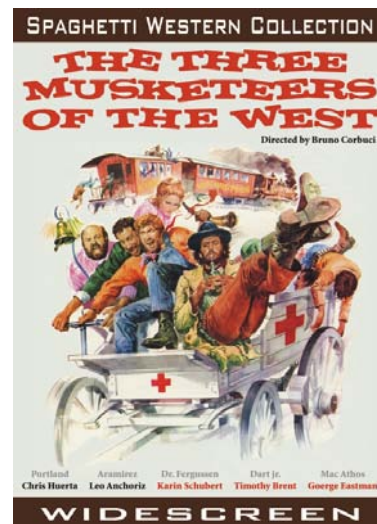
It is interesting to note that he wrote many screenplays for his brother Sergio and had a role in the creation of one of the most loved spaghetti westerns of all time, Django. Indeed it is Django which many see as being the foundation of the genre.

His own approach to directing seemed to emphasize comedy and in this film he took Alexander Dumas' classic The Three Musketeers and adapted it into a spaghetti western film with rather amusing results if you like spoof films and I rather enjoy them. It is a usual spaghetti western heavy with slapstick, so much so it has been called a stooges spaghetti western! Get ready for non-stop slapping, fighting, brawling, head-knocking, foodfights and even some martial arts. Look out for the putrid cheese and the hollowed out Bible with a brick inside !

It is packed with a diverse range of music and even includes some brief full frontal nudity. Karin Schubert, who plays the doctor, later moved into hardcore sex films in her forties.



The Three Musketeers of the West follows Texas Ranger Dart Junior as he investigates a shady New Orleans banker, Riche LeDuque who secretly plans to ship a load of gold to Mexican dictator Ortega. To get the gold into Mexico undetected, he plans to hide the bars in the ambulance wagon of Alice Fergusson (Karin Schubert), who is supposedly on a mission of mercy delivering a wagonload of sleeping sickness vaccines.



Dart enlists three retired rangers (The Three Inseparables) to assist in foiling the evil bankers plan, Mac Athos (George Eastman), Aramirez (Leo Anchoriz), and Portland (Chris Huerta). Things don't go quite to plan as they outwit the banker but take the gold for themselves.

The plot in Three Musketeers will take a bit of following; there are all sorts of twists and turns, double crosses and scenes which defy logic such as extended card tricks scene and a martial arts episode which seems to pop out of nowhere and is incongruent with the rest of the time. The characters are, well, over developed, the three retired rangers seem more like overwrought children and we also get introduced to a whole community of Chinese martial artists, a German circus ringmaster, a midget sheriff and lots more weirdness.

This is certainly a weird sort of spaghetti western bringing in large amounts of slapstick and physical humour, a frenetic plot and an overload of characters. While the acting is not especially memorable, it is a film which offers a laugh a minute and hence is a light diversion which is well worth watching.

Dorado Films have done a great job with a rare film, there is only very minor damage here and there and the sound is crystal clear.

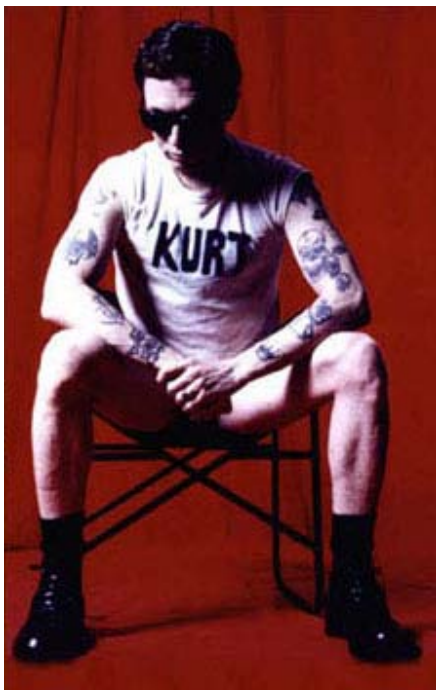
NO SKIN OFF MY ASS: THE QUEERPUNK CINEMA OF BRUCE LABRUCE

Bruce LaBruce is a writer, film-maker, and photographer from Canada. Born Justin Steward in Southampton, Ontario in 1961, he first became noticed on the indie queer scene through his production of a range of gay punk magazines such as *J.D* and *Dumb Bitch Deserves to Die* in which he challenged the prevailing definitions of what it meant to be gay.

He moved on to produce a range of super 8 movies which helped solidify his cult celebrity status. Bruce La Bruce became the spokesman for the *Homocore* or *Queercore* movement which moved away from the politically correct definition of sexuality and developed an in-your-face punk style,

His first feature film *No Skin Off My Ass* released in 1991, was a black-and-white comedy drama starring La Bruce and Klaus von Bröcker. It offered an

exploration of the emotional and sexual relationship between an effete hairdresser (played by LaBruce himself) and a mute, young, handsome yet rather agro young skinhead with whom he was totally obsessed. The film works together an explicit sexual, emotional and psychological dynamic with a radical political message, themes which will continue through all his work.



This was followed by *Super 8 ½* (1994), a bio-pic about LaBruce's rise to cult stardom. LaBruce plays himself as an aging porn star and director who enters into a partnership with a lesbian filmmaker.

It becomes clear as the film progresses that she has her own agenda and is exploiting him to help her succeed in her own project, "Submit To My Finger," her tribute to New York underground auteur Richard Kern.



LaBruce's real acclaim came with *Hustler White* (1996), made in collaboration with L.A. based fetish photographer Rick Castro. Co-starring supermodel Tony Ward and LaBruce himself, *Hustler* premiered at Sundance and went on to become a film festival and cult favourite.

Sexual anthropologist Jürgen Anger (played by Bruce La Bruce) flies in to LA to begin research for a new book on the seedy side of gay sex in Hollywood. He is clearly modelled on Kenneth Anger (of *Hollywood Babylon* and various gay cult films), yet repeatedly denies it throughout the film giving his character an ironic twist. At the same time Montgomery (Monti to his friends) works the street. After plying his trade with a well-built bearded bear, he steals his wallet and car, running over another sex worker in the process and crushing his foot as he drives back and forth trying to escape. A scene which is grotesquely amusing.

At that moment Jurgen sees him at a distance and falls instantly in love; he grabs the blood-stained shirt Monti has left behind and it becomes a fetish for his desire. These two characters and their chess game of lust, desire and perhaps love form the backbone of the film. At first Monti thinks Jurgen is a cop trying to arrest him, but then is hired by Jurgen to lead him through Hollywood as a guide to the sex underground. They finally come together but only after Monti nearly dies hits his head in Jurgen's spa pool and Jurgen takes his limp body to the



Tony Ward in *Hustler White*

beach to dispose of it, and Monti only regains consciousness just in time !

What makes this strange love story so fascinating is that Bruce La Bruce does not portray sex in a clean and rarefied fashion; it is filled with all manner of fetishes, strange desires, fears, neurosis' and, of course, finally love and companionship. Bruce La Bruce is the enfant terrible of Gay filmmaking. His movies are always controversial, ranging from his confronting early skin head sex films to his more recent Gay Zombie spectacular *Otto*. The look of *Hustler White* is also helped by the collaboration of Rick Castro, a Los Angeles erotic and fetish photographer.

Of course, Bruce La Bruce always portrays sex explicitly and likes to shock as well as amuse. *Hustler White* must hold the record for the sheer abundance of fetishes shown from Amputee Fetishism to a funeral director who likes to bind young men in masking tape. From a Cowboy who wants to literally saddle up and ride his rent boys to drag, leather, Sado-Masochism and Bondage and Discipline.

Hustler White is really a dark comedy which uses sexual extremes to confront and entertain. There are no doubts there are some very politically incorrect scenes, the scene in which a young white male hustler (played by well known American porn star Kevin Kramer), is taught some lessons in "black power" by being drilled by some eight, ten (I lost count !) black men is totally over the top and one is not sure whether to be horrified or amused.

Hustler White is also a massive "inside joke" as well, Bruce La Bruce plays Jurgen Anger, Tony Ward, a well known male model (featured in the



Madonna sex videos) is Monti, many of the rent boys are real porn stars or respected gay performers. There are also other fun cameos, for example, the Cowboy fetishist is Stew Blake, a very well known gay country and western singer!

To enjoy *Hustler White* you need a very broad and raucous sense of humour. For me this is the joy of Bruce La Bruce, he creates films in which we can laugh at ourselves and the thing which people take so seriously - sex. La Bruce presents sex as fun, dirty and quirky, sometimes lustful, and sometimes loving – in other words he presents it as it really is. So many films (gay and straight) present an idealized view of sex and relationships, everyone is so beautiful and the sex so clean, so sanitized. Not Bruce La Bruce - here sex is messy, dirty, filled with lots of body-types from skinheads to large-build men, from people with piercings to rent boys.

Hustler White is funny, sexy, over the top, at times shocking, at times moving, but above all, great entertainment.

In late August 1998 LaBruce went to the U.K. to shoot his first porn movie. *Skin Flick*, produced by Berlin's Cazzo Films, concerns a gang of queer neo-nazi skinheads who break into the home of an annoying middle-class gay couple and sexually terrorize them. The film stars Tom International and high fashion model and actress Nikki Uberti. In the same year LaBruce released his memoirs in the form of *The Reluctant Pornographer* (Gutter Press, 1998) and became a well-established photographer and columnist for such magazines as *Honcho*, *Inches* and *Toronto's Eye*.

The Raspberry Reich (2004) was the next gre-



nade from LaBruce and certainly went off with quite a bang. It was released in two forms. The *Raspberry Reich* was a carefully edited version for general consumption, while the uncut explicit version was called *The Revolution Is My Boyfriend* (Cazzo Film) and continued where *The Raspberry Reich* left off with wallops of explicit sex and revolutionary rhetoric.

The Raspberry Reich is a complex and challenging film, not only because of its wild sexually-explicit content but because of its revolutionary tenor. The term Reich is used both in a political sense and to refer to Wilhelm Reich, author of "The Function of the Orgasm" who believed that sexuality has a truly revolutionary power. Reich believed that fascism and conservatism were products of sexual repression and only with the free expression of orgasmic potency could the world be free.

The characters of the film are seen as homosexual revolutionaries who are not above using "arm struggle" to achieve their goals. A break-away group from the Baader-Meinhof Gang, their members are all named after original members of the Gang or related revolutionaries such as Che Guevara.

The term *Raspberry Reich* is used by the



leader of the group to refer to the new form of oppression that has developed in the West - repression by consumerism.

The central plot focuses on the kidnapping of Patrick, the son of a wealthy industrialist. The aim is to break him and transform his sexuality from consumerist heterosexual into queer revolutionary, however, there is only one problem, he is already queer ! While terrorism is an uncomfortable subject today, it is actually used in a way to parody bourgeois middle class revolutionaries. At times LaBruce seems to be ridiculing both the corporate values of the consumerist society and the petty middle class revolutionaries or worse, "blue blood" radicals who have been born with money while resenting it. There is a contempt expressed throughout the film for the supposedly "Marxist" rich who hate the fact that they were born with such a large slice of the pie and go to psychiatrists to get over it, while the poor would be just happy with some crumbs off the table.

LaBruce is able to express such concepts through extremely witty dialogue, outrageous political discussions and some of the most amusing slogans even found in a film. Just some that come to mind: "The Revolution is my boyfriend!", "Fuck me for the Revolution!", "Join the homosexual intifada!", "Heterosexuality is the Opiate of the Masses" and "No revolution without sexual revolution. No sexual revolution without homosexual revolution."

Anything outside the revolution is declared to be counter revolutionary including Madonna, Masturbation and Cornflakes !!

As can be imagined Raspberry Reich horrified the censors, shocked the film-going public and drove politically-correct gays back into the closet! At the same time it became an instant cult classic. The question that was on everyone's lips was what could LaBruce come up with next? Well, in 2008 we had the answer: A Gay Zombie film !

Otto or Up with Dead People (2008) was the logical next step for LaBruce. While it seems more mainstream than his other films, it is actually more subversive, encoding his message through the genre of horror, mixed, of course, with queer sentiments and sex

Being a Zombie is "the only sane and logical response to a dead and sterile world."



Otto with his roadkill dinner

The film opens with a poetic introduction, filmed in black and white, showing the awakening of Otto from the grave and with a "cool" voice-over discussing the state of the modern zombie. It seems zombies have slowly evolved the ability to speak and reason and are now more accepted in society. The voice-over has a semi-documentary feel and also discusses the philosophical nature of the zombie while suggesting it could also be read as a metaphor.

Throughout the film various cinematic techniques are used to create a distance between the viewer and the subject, including black and white, colour, spot colour, even 1930's silent film. The aim of these seems to be to emphasise the alienated and estranged character of Otto and indeed of the zombies in general. La Bruce also mixes a logical plot with surreal elements and a challenging mix of sex and death, poetry and philosophical ramblings offered in both voiceover and by various characters

There is also an interesting sub plot about Medea Yarn, an art-house filmmaker who is making a film about Zombies called "up with dead people". This film within a film is a very effective and communicative motif.



Hella -
beauty, stylish and vacuous

Yarn wants to use the zombie image to make a point about the nature of society and in conjunction with her brother Adolf and her lover Hella Bent, she is at last creating her “epic political-porno-zombie movie”. This sub-plot is poignant, cynical and vindictive. It offers an ongoing critique of the pretentious baby boomer capitalist who while sprouting left-wing rhetoric is actually simply just another consumer. She sprouts meaningless clichés, wears goth clothing and “plays” at being unique and different and yet comes across as totally artificial. As she attempts to show her actors what she expects in her work, she plays her other earlier “underground films” (an amazing cinematic touch, a series of films shown by a filmmaker making a zombie film inside a film about zombies !), they are the epitome of empty style and vacuity.

Throughout the plot we have these juxtapositions between the real zombie and the fakes, the outsider (Otto) and the “would be” (Medea Yarn and her crowd), between fantasy and self delusion and reality, between authentic difference and pretension and so on. This is further

emphasized by the fact that every time Hella Bent is shown she is either shown as within a silent film or in a black and white silent film haze. She is shown as being totally “unreal” – locked in her own pretension and delusions as are Medea Yarn and her film crew.

Bruce La Bruce has also encoded an exploration of homophobia into the film which is powerful and at times confronting. While the zombies are now “somewhat more accepted” and seen as having developed “speech” (we now have a “voice”) and reason (i.e. we are not “disordered”), they are still treated as pariahs and objects of fear.

Probably the most moving (and serious) episode in the film is when Otto is bashed. Up until this scene Otto has been having flashbacks of Rudolf his love, these are beautifully and romantically photographed and shown. However, when he meets his ex, Rudolf reminds him that Rudolf dumped him as Rudolf just can’t cope with any sort of illness and couldn’t deal with Otto being sick.

As Otto wanders in confusion, he is followed by a gang of mindless young men and brutally bashed. The music to this scene is by Antony and the Johnsons and creates a poignant scene, the message of which is that even when you are dead you are still not safe.

La Bruce, however, is also a nuanced filmmaker and he also explores the way in which sex can overpower love and affection and the way society and, at times, the gay community reduces love to lust alone. “*The world is meat. We are meat.*” This is shown as a recurring motif ranging from Otto’s lover rejecting him due to the fact that Otto has become ill to Otto relating sex to meat and consumption.



We are what we eat becomes more literal in *Otto* with all manner of sex and consumption imagery.

There is also an interesting question of whether *Otto* is really a zombie. When he meets his ex-lover he realises he had depression and was once in an institution and this is followed later in the film with a love film in which he doesn't look physically dead. Yet after he has had sex why had his partner's left eye turned red? So is *Otto* a zombie or is he simply an isolated outsider? We never really know. This ambiguity is the basis for the whole film where the gay zombie is the ultimate outsider; perhaps, the undead *Otto* is the only really alive person in the whole film.

Themes in Bruce LaBruce's Work

At first it is very easy to simply write off LaBruce's films as the work of a queer L'enfant terrible, a punk version of John Waters. Certainly it is fair to say that the mixture of radical political ideas, explicit sex, punk music and skinheads as well as zombies makes the content of his films at times troublesome for manner. However, there are significant themes which underlie all his movies, themes which challenge many of our preconceived models of sexuality, gender and culture.

LaBruce's use of explicit sex is one of the things which confronts people the most, especially since it is queer sex and usually at the more wild end of the spectrum such as fetish and skinhead sex. The reason behind this mode of expression is not simply to create porn; he could have easily done this without the need for any great artistic sentiment – look at the mountains of boring skin flicks that pour out of the US every year. LaBruce uses sex in a number of different ways



Sex and death in *Otto*

to encode a message. He first argues that sex is simply another bodily function and there is no reason not to show it. This is still a radical sentiment even in 2009. Though scientifically we accept man is the product of evolution and hence his bodily functions are as normal as any other animal, we shy away from facing the facts of sex and death. (Both are explored in *Otto*). LaBruce deliberately confronts us with "messy" and honest sex to remind us of our nature and to avoid the pretense so often found in other adult titles. This is not cleaned up erotica with perfect plastic models with plastic "bits", but real people in real situations.

He also uses sex as a way to express diversity. LaBruce deliberately argues against the simple dichotomy of gay and straight and shows sex in all its myriad forms. In *Hustler White*, for example, he literally offers us a smorgasbord of sexual diversity covering all manner of fetishes from amputee to Sadomasochism. Of course this always challenges the prudes and the censors and his films have run into numerous issues with rating boards worldwide.

Hustler White street scene



Raspberry Reich scene



This issue of diversity also leads us into a number of other themes which are central to LaBruce's work. One of the underlying explorations of LaBruce's films is the limitations of our constructs of human sexuality. LaBruce criticises both our views of what it means to be gay and what it means to be straight (heterosexual).

In 2009 it seems as soon as someone finds themselves with a same-sex attraction they come out of the closet to sign a contract of ideological agreement. Many have started to debate whether this "politically correct" form of social construct is acceptable. Gore Vidal, the highly respected US author stated he was "*not gay, but a homosexualist*".

"The word gay doesn't precisely describe male homosexuality. It prances around the issue. The word gay describes an entire cultural and political movement. It describes a way of being and behaving and believing that expands far beyond a mere sexual preference. So for a man who prefers to have sex with men, but who finds himself at odds with the ideas, beliefs, aesthetics and culture that the word gay also communicates, identifying himself as "gay" is technically and meaningfully inaccurate." Jack Malebranche in an interview at Hoover Hog.

Jack Malebranche author of *Androphilia, A Manifesto: Rejecting the Gay Identity, Reclaiming Masculinity* (Scapegoat Publishing 2007) and *Blood Brothers* (2008) is a major critique of the "gay" model of homosexual identity. Another classic work is *Anti-Gay* by Mark Simpson (Cassell Press 1999)



LaBruce confronts these models by deliberately using politically incorrect images, sexually diverse content and emphasizing the wide diversity of same-sex experience which exists way beyond the simple label of being "gay".

He also takes a swipe at what has come to be called "heteronormality". This term is used to define the social constructs which have developed around heterosexual activity. If we accept that man is the product of evolutionary development (and a fool wouldn't) and reject the superstitions of religious ideology, then we need to re-assess what heterosexuality actually means outside of a religious context.

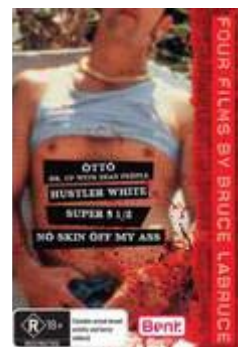
If we accept Richard Dawkins that man is the fifth ape and God is well and truly dead then the world is a very different place from what it was a hundred years ago. The question then arises what role does marriage, childbearing, gender roles, beauty and so on play when removed from the strictures of religious conditioning.

While much of our culture is "post-theistic", it still seems that the conditioning remains fast. LaBruce challenges these roles and also critiques the way that some members of the gay community mimic heterosexual roles in an attempt to gain acceptance. This exploration of the "diversity of sexuality" really moves beyond the gay/straight dichotomy. LaBruce's work really embraces Sigmund Freud's observation that everyone is born polymorphously perverse and that their sexual desires can be drawn toward any object or gender. This is, of course, backed up by the research of Dr. Alfred Kinsey which showed that over 46% of the male subjects had "reacted" sexually to persons of both sexes in the course of their adult lives, and 37% had at least one homosexual experience.

LaBruce's work challenges our assumptions about both sexuality and gender and therefore also critiques the foundations of our culture which is based on false assumptions carried over from long dead worldviews. His political critiques of both left and right argue for a new view of culture and while these are most clearly expressed in Raspberry Reich, they are found throughout all his films.

Entering LaBruce's World

A good way to explore LaBruce's challenging vision of the world is the box set "Four Films By Bruce LaBruce" which includes *Otto*, *Hustler White*, *Super 8½* and *No Skin Off My Ass*. Each of the films is nicely presented with superior film and sound quality and it is available at a very reasonable price.



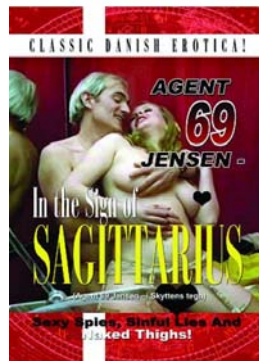
It is released in Australia by Kojo films, distributed by Gryphon Distribution and available throughout Australia.

EROTICA ON DVD



**Agent 69 Jensen
In The Sign of
Sagittarius
Original Release 1978
MVD 2009
R1 DVD (M)**

Denmark
Danish with clear English
subtitles



Ole Soltoft, Gina Janssen, Torben Bille and Anna Bergman appear once again in another sexy romp from the 1970s. There is something about these films – it's as if they knew they were not making great cinema but didn't care. They just enjoyed what they were doing. The name of the production company, Happy Film, also points to this. The film was the last of the Agent 69 series, made towards the end of the Danish softcore film period. After this, as other countries entered the market, hardcore pornography gradually took over.

Few of the major actors took part in the sex scenes, which are a bit rough in places. They look like they have been made separately and inserted later. In spite of this their film quality seems to be a little better than that of the non-erotic scenes.

The film has a lot in common with Agent 69 Jensen – in the Sign of Scorpio but loses a bit of



the enthusiasm of the earlier film. Much of Scorpio is recycled – the jokes, the women, the dwarf, even the plot. About the only cast change of note is Lee Fong Wong as a beautiful Asian spy.

This time a valuable microfilm of rocket plans has been lost and Danish Intelligence is out to recover it. It is hidden in one of four womens' makeup compacts. The other three are packed with explosives. The final showdown takes place in a weight loss clinic where the doctor in charge believes sex is the best way to lose weight. This is a suitable excuse to have nubile underclad young ladies all over the place. The doctor's theory seems to work as none of the ladies looks the least bit overweight, and I must say I took the time to study them thoroughly.



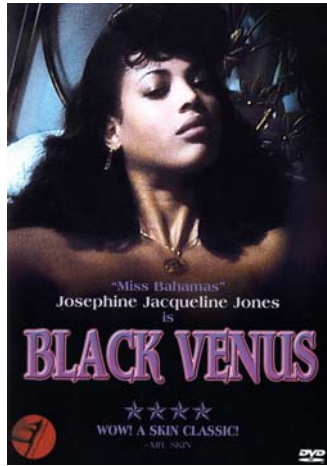
The leading characters are both raving lunatics and the actors ham it up for all they're worth. The head of Danish security thinks he is King Christian IV and Kraputski, the head of Albanian intelligence (Benny Hansen) keeps shouting for some reason "Stenka razin !". Possibly it means "overacting" in Albanian?

It's good harmless fun and possibly a little better than the current genre because it's not really trying to be pornographic.

Black Venus (1983)
Classic Erotica
Playboy
Enterprises Inc
Private Screening
Collection
R0 DVD
Ryko Distribution
(M)

This classic tale is based on a story "The Girl With The Golden Eyes" by Honore de Balzac. In the 19th century dark skinned girls from the French colonies were often prized for their beauty and mystery although just as often they were regarded as primitive savages to be exploited.

Jacques is a "collector of beautiful objects on canvas and stone, sometimes in the flesh." His latest discovery is Venus, a young girl of mixed descent from Martinique.. Jacques' young friend Armand, an impoverished artist, falls in love with Venus and she with him. They are happy together but Armand's income cannot support them. Venus goes to work modelling gowns for a society couturier. The work involves a little more exposure and flirting with the customers' husbands than Armand would like and his jealousy starts to develop. It is destructive to his artistic talents – he is so besotted by Venus he has stopped doing any other work. His only project is a lifesize sculpture of Venus herself but he will not sell the sculpture to keep them going. Jacques tries to help but by this stage the obsessive Armand is losing his wits from his love for Venus and his jealousy of her work. Finally



Venus realises she is destroying Armand and leaves him.

From here her life is a rocky ride of lust, rape and degradation. She finds work in as a prostitute in the best house in Paris. Her only apparent friend is Louise, another girl from Madame Lili's establishment where she has finished up. The girls have a lesbian relationship going.

Jacques discovers where Venus is living and buys her from Madame Lili. He also has the statue of Venus that he took from Armand's rooms after Armand's complete breakdown. He now has both beauties, the fleshly one and the work of art. He has left Armand in medical care. Jacques also buys Louise and the two girls find a sort of happiness in Jacques' villa in Spain. Then Armand tracks her down.

You're in my dreams. And in my nightmares. You've been my inspiration, and my destruction.

Venus is played by the lovely Josephine Jacqueline Jones, a former Miss Bermuda, and is almost perfect for the part. "Almost" because sometimes her American accent creeps into her lines and it is a little incongruous in such a beautiful period piece. Otherwise I can't fault the film.

It never crosses the line from erotica to pornography but the erotic element is very strong. If full frontal views of beautiful girls is not your thing, you're not going to enjoy this film, but the nudity is simply an essential part of the plot. It's a powerful story of love, lust and destruction and it should be viewed as such.



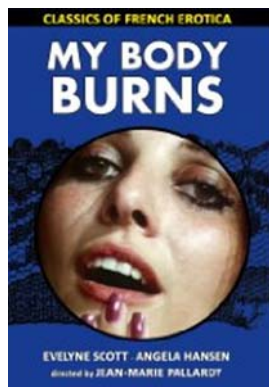
My Body Burns (1972)
Early French Erotica
Rereleased 2009
Le Chat Qui Fume
MVD (Distributor)
R1 DVD
(E)

Director Jean-Marie Pallardy made the change from male model to film director in the 1970s and this was his first full-length feature. As a result the film has some rough edges that are aggravated by a poor conversion to English.

“Doug” is a notary (the equivalent, I think, of a Justice of the Peace and a respected position) in a small French town. He is well past his youth but has not yet married. He gets his sexual satisfaction from the occasional orgy at his house and by chasing the village’s young females. Despite his discretion gossip is spreading in the village and a rumour is spreading that he prefers boys to girls. He must marry to save his reputation. He is attracted to Evelyne, a rather younger girl who is, in turn, attracted to his fortune.

There is a problem. Evelyne is in a long-term lesbian relationship with the possessive and sulky-looking Michelle, who has no intention of letting her girlfriend go. She threatens to expose Doug’s sexual habits if Evelyne leaves her. She will name the people who have taken part in his orgies. Doug decides that she will have to die.

So much for the plot, now let’s go to bed and get on with it. There is a strong emphasis on style over plot, as you would expect in this type of film. Pallardy’s direction makes the most of the women’s bodies, with each shot lovingly framed and beautifully filmed. This is true erotica, not porn. Unfortunately many of the bedroom shots go on forever and the background



music is often overpowering and inappropriate. The outside scenes in the forest look better, but the music problem still exists – it’s a sort of jazz club / elevator music fusion that seems as out of place now as it probably was then.

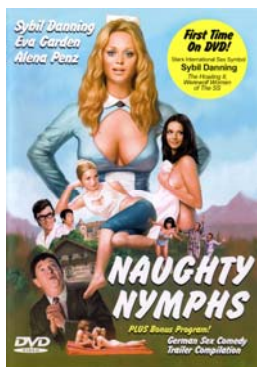
The film is not helped by some really bad overdubbing in places. Rather than force some harsh American accents over a film that looks decidedly European, I think it would have been better to keep the French track and simply subtitle it. This would have kept the French flavour and improved the overall film. The overdubbing may have been necessary, though, to appeal to U.S. audiences who were starting to move out from their own skin flicks and investigate what the rest of the world had to offer (such as the Danish Agent 69 films reviewed in earlier issues of Synergy). This overseas influence probably culminated in the release of Emmanuelle, possibly the best-known French erotic film, in 1975. Strangely, My Body Burns has many touches of the style of the later Emmanuelle so Pallardy may have been on the right track. He also managed to put a little humour into some of the characters such as the promiscuous underage maid. Many erotic films take themselves too seriously and the touches of humour are welcome to break the sexual tension.

Overall there are enough weaknesses to make this film something of a disappointment. It could have been so much better, and probably was when it was released in the original French. We will use it as a starting point in Pallardy’s film career and look at some of his later films in further reviews. He was still producing erotica into the 1980s when France’s exploitation cinema started to wind down. Three of his early films have been rereleased in the Classics of French Erotica series.

The film has been well remastered. The DVD includes clips from some of his other films including a Western, and there is also a gallery of stills and photos of some of his actresses.



Naughty Nymphs
2009
Erotic Comedy
Germany
Secret Key Motion
Pictures
R0 DVD (M)



This film dates back to 1972 when it was called (translated from German) Love Thirsty Girls and is a German take on erotic movies. It is a light-hearted little romp in which the comedy seems more important than the eroticism. It seems to be a typical cheapie release destined for the world's drive-in theatres, and it is here that I first saw it.

The plot is fairly basic and obviously intended as a comedy. The local puritan pharmacist has three daughters. Elizabeth (Sybil Danning) is Miss Virgin, and she keeps losing jobs because she refuses the advances of her superiors. Her two sisters, stuck at home, are outright nymphomaniacs who are having it off with their boyfriends each night in their father's house. The sisters and their boyfriends can't get married yet as their father has an old fashioned idea that the oldest girl should be married first. When Elizabeth returns home after losing her latest job she finds out what is going on and threatens to expose her sisters. There is only one solution – they must get Elizabeth laid. This is not as easy as it seems. She has an ex-boyfriend in the town but sex with him is out of the question. The doctor at a local rejuvenation clinic is a possibility, but since she has recently had a bad time with men in her life she rejects him also. She does, however, accept a job there as a nurse.

In an old medicine book the boys discover a potency pill recipe. They try it on some of the villagers and it works, so they decide to try it on



Elizabeth's potential boyfriends to see if they can get her aroused enough to lose her virginity. Unfortunately it is taken by the elderly men at the rejuvenation clinic instead. Now the comedy and misunderstandings start.

The film is not particularly erotic by today's standards – a bit of full frontal nudity, no male organs in sight anywhere, more suggestiveness than sex. The women are however quite attractive (Sybil Danning was definitely at her best at this time) and the acting is quite good. The plot is silly, but still fun – better than its American equivalents at the time. The film has suffered badly from age, though, and the colour is unnaturally bright and contrasty as if it has been enhanced but not colour-corrected. Still, it's not too bad for its age.

The film is not a masterpiece but it does bring back some good memories.

Nude in Dracula's
Castle 2009
Secret Key Motion
Pictures
R0 DVD (M)



This two-DVD set shows some of the many hundreds of "loops" or "peeps" that first appeared during World War 2 and became more popular in the 1950s and 1960s. They were shown in amusement arcade "Peepshow" machines and were generally a five minute loop of a girl showing herself off in the nude. Some had a semblance of a plot but there isn't much you can do in five minutes. In any case, their purpose was titillation, not drama.

They were shot on 8mm film, later 16mm, usually black and white, and often of dubious quality. There was no sound, although for this DVD musical tracks have been added. Acting ability was not a prerequisite for the young ladies. All that was required of them was a decent body and the ability and willingness to show it off. Very few went past exhibitionism, and even "beaver" shots were not particularly common until the late 1960s. Many of the early loops never went below the waist. Partly this was a response to local municipal laws of the time. The more tolerant Los Angeles seems to have



been the main point of manufacture and distribution, especially in the later days when outside shots became more popular.

Since they were designed to take large amounts of small change from bored youths and servicemen, they wore out quickly. The early loops were usually untitled so building up a catalogue of them is difficult. They are significant in the history of erotica. Before this home film equipment was expensive and "stag movies" were hard to get. These short films led to a wider availability of erotica and a greater acceptance of it. They prepared the way for the home videotape explosion of the 1970s.

It is possible to date some of them roughly from clothing and shoe styles of the actresses. Earlier loops feature slightly more mature women, often carrying a bit of excess weight. The action content was mostly rolling around on the bed, sometimes accompanied by a short striptease. In later loops the women were younger and in better shape and the camera moved a little lower. There was a little more emphasis on scenery and movement around the room. Outside shots such as around the pool or at the beach became more common. Many of the models actually looked as if they were enjoying themselves. Finally full frontal became acceptable.

The final ones verged on pornographic, with "split beaver" shots, masturbation up and fondling, shaving of pubic hair and a generally wider range of shots exploring the whole female form. It is, however, nice to see women who aren't silicone-enhanced. Finally that strangely American form of porno idiocy, wearing stiletto-heeled shoes in bed during the action, began to appear. Who knows how many brave cameramen suffered terrible injuries from these as they moved in for that really closeup shot?

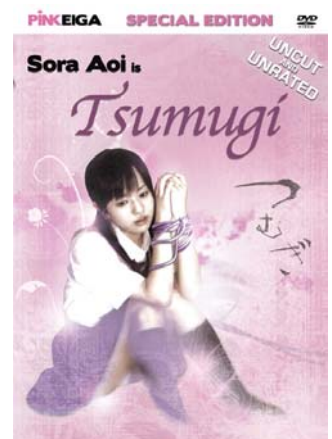
It is named (unusual), the girl is particularly attractive and at least has some acting ability, it is shot in different rooms (rare for the time), it includes other actors (also rare) and moving camera shots (almost unheard of).

Most of the loops show their age with scratches, fading and general wear and tear. The early colour film has faded badly as well. Let's not forget the actresses, either. It is interesting to look at them and realize that they are probably grannies by now. In spite of this the DVDs show a little appreciated but important part of film erotica. When all is said and done these short loops paved the way for greater tolerance in film.

Secret Key Motion Pictures

Web: <http://secretkeymotionpictures.com>

Tsumugi: Special Edition
Hidekazu Takahara
Region 0
Pink Eiga (M)



Tsumugi aka Seifuku bisyojo sensei atashi wo daite is a classic example of a high quality Japanese Pink Film, directed by Hidekazu Takahara who is known in the west for *Zero Woman: Dangerous Game* (1998)

Now what is a Pink Film you may ask. Pink Films or Pink Eiga is a unique form of Japanese soft erotica. It is very different from what we experience as "adult" titles in the west. It is not explicit pornography nor the purely for titillation softcore of the US market, it is marked by a unique sense of style, high quality cinematography and intriguing and unusual themes.

Compared to current trends in erotica from the US, Pink Films are a breadth of fresh air filled with innovation, unusual themes, social commentary and a great sense of humour.

The first Pink Films appeared in the early 1960s and they flooded the Japanese domestic cinema market right through to the mid-1980s. The original Sixties films were primarily the product of indie studios, with major studios only moving in during the Seventies and Eighties. Obviously the advent of more explicit films from the late Eighties onwards has had some effect

on the genre, but there is still enough that makes it a unique genre that many are still produced today. Indeed in 2008 alone there were 80 new Pink films released.

Pink Films have a strict set of rules which in many ways make them very unusual in the history of erotic films. According to famed Japanese film and cultural historians Donald Richie and Pia Harritz the four fundamental elements that constitute a Pink Eiga are:

1. The film must have the requisite number of sex scenes (typically a minimum of five).
2. The film must be approximately one hour in length (perfect for the Pink Eiga triple-bill format).
3. It must be shot on 35 mm film (or occasionally 16mm) in a week and finished within one month.
4. The film must be completed within an extremely limited budget (around \$35,000 US).

In *Tsumugi* the striking and beautiful Aoi Sola plays the central character, a young and sexually precocious teenager who seduces her teacher, Katagiri. However, life is never as simple as it seems because the married Katagiri is already in a relationship with another teacher Yoko.

Katagiri ends up having some sort of mid life crisis and falls for Tsumugi as she makes him feel young again, even though his wife is in the hospital about to have a baby. He works hard to keep both Yoko and Tsumugi happy but things begin to get complicated.

But Tsumugi cannot be easily tied down, she is exploring her sexuality and enjoying the freedom that entails. While she likes the older and more experienced Katagiri, she also takes a liking to Kosuke, a younger and less sexually experienced schoolmate.

We also met a punk rocker friend of Katagiri who also experiences a life lesson which provides an interesting twist to the film. Of course, all these entanglements soon before difficult, especially as Yoko, who is actually in love with Katagiri, discovers the passionate love affair between Tsumugi and Katagiri and she is not pleased at all, to say the least.

The surprising thing about *Tsumugi* is how well the film is made. When you think of erotica you don't immediately think of plot, characters and



cinematography but that is what you get.

Sure, let's not forget there is lots of sex and beautiful bodies, but there is also a real exploration of that unique sexual awakening that occurs in the teen years, it is insightful, moving and intensely erotic at the same time.

Katagiri also offers superb insight into that middle age period when life has become a little too predictable and you want something exciting, even if you know on some level that it cannot last and will all end in tears!

Since Sora Aoi is a major Japanese media personality, nude model, and star of erotic film, Pink Eiga has really loaded the DVD with a swag of extras including:

Hidekazu Takahara's Director's Notes, Production Diaries: Making *Tsumugi*, *Tsumugi* International Movie Trailers, Cast and Crew Biographies and Filmographies, Still Image Slideshows, Sora Aoi *Tsumugi* Photo Albums, the original Japanese Movie Poster, Dread Nought Music Videos and Sneak Peeks: More Pink Eiga Trailers. There are also some superb featurettes: "Blue Skies, Pink Days", "Naked Confessions" and "One Night with Sora Aoi".

The quality of the DVD cannot be faulted, the picture is crystal clear and comes with 5.1 sound. It is in Japanese with clear English subtitles and is region 0 and hence will play worldwide.

It is well looking through the Pink Eiga site they have a wide range of unusual pink cinema titles (various of which have been reviewed in Synergy). They are one of the only firms in the US releasing pink titles in such high quality editions and are worthy of support.

Pink Eiga

Web: <http://www.pinkeiga.com>

Nunsplotation



I have always been a sucker for nuns in films; the naughtier the better ! It is something about the perversion of innocence that is so erotic and at the same time subversive. The whole concept of a group of women who have become married to a long-dead individual, who may or may not have even existed at all, is both fascinating and on some level repugnant. Nuns have always been a subject of fascination in the cinema with depictions ranging from ideal, devoted religious mystics to, more often than not, frustrated and sadistic Mother Superiors. Of course, I am not alone in my interest in this strange form of cinema; there is a whole genre of exploitation film known as Nunsplotation.

It is fascinating to chart the development of this genre throughout cinema history. Most film historians see its precursor in *Witchcraft through the Ages* (aka *Haxan*) which was a Danish film by Benjamin Christensen made in 1922. *Haxan* is really quite an astounding film. It opens with a series of woodcuts and engravings, then offers a series of dramatic vignettes, illustrating the awesome power of witchcraft in the Middle Ages.

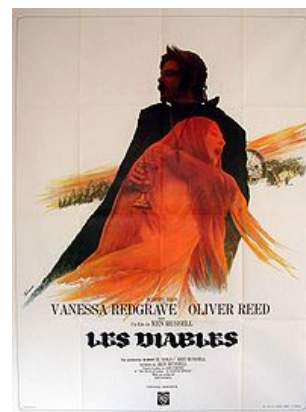
These are truly awe-inspiring in both presentation and intensity and they continue to shock and fascinate even today. Many of them border on exploitation with truly bizarre tales of monks and nuns and their seduction by the devil as well as *Black Masses* and *Witchcraft*.

A gorgeous devil from *Haxan*



Haxan was the title of the original full length film. In 1968 a shorter version called "*Witchcraft through the Ages*" was released with a jazz soundtrack and voice-over by Sixties radical author William Burroughs. The definitive DVD edition is the Criterion R1 release.

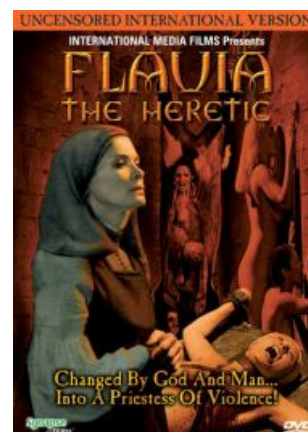
The real focus of Nunsplotation cinema was in the 1970's with the majority of films coming from European countries (including England). Many mark its beginning with the *The Devils* (1972) by Ken Russell. It starred Oliver Reed and Vanessa Redgrave with outstanding designs by Derek Jarman who went on to become a major filmmaker in his own right.



The film was heavily cut and even then had trouble achieving an X rating in the UK. Recently the uncut footage has been assembled into a complete 111 minute edition and there are rumours of an upcoming release from Warner Bros. As yet it has not had any formal release on DVD.

Other classics from the period include *Nun and the Devil* (1973), *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun* (Jess Franco) (1973) and *Flavia The Heretic* (1974).

Flavia The Heretic is a favourite within the genre.





Flavia (Florinda Bolkan) is forced into a life as a nun by her father, Sir Richard. She is unhappy with her lot and finds the rituals constraining and demeaning. She regularly daydreams of a warrior whom she witnessed her father beheading when she was a young girl. One day a strange ecstatic cult called the Tarantulas arrive at the convent and introduce the girls to strange rites of ecstatic devotion.

Of course this leads to all sorts of extreme behavior as the nuns relieve their frustrations with dances and visions. One of the nuns becomes totally out of control, tearing off her habit and caressing her naked body while imagining a statue coming to life and satisfying her every need. The nunnery is finally brought back under control, the Tarantulas are expelled and the rather over-excited nun thrown into a cell. The nun is taken away by the Bishop and then tortured under the authority of her father.

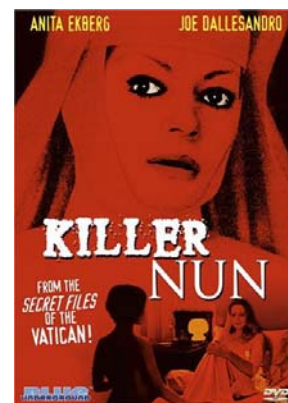
Flavia becomes more and more disillusioned as she sees the new Duke raping a farm girl. She runs away but is caught and whipped. Finally, broken but still rebellious, she plans her revenge. When a band of Moslems attack the town, she joins them and returns to the convent to teach them all a lesson.

Flavia is quite unique in the Nunsploration canon in that it is beautifully filmed, has quite a powerful score and is actually quite an impressive film which balances historical elements with exploitation.

While it has been generally assumed that the focus of the genre has been on monasteries and the inquisition, there have also been many films which have pushed outside these boundaries and moved the genre into the modern period such as the ever popular *Killer Nun* (1978).

Killer Nun (aka *Suor Omicidi*, or *Deadly Habits*) (1978) is Italian in origin, directed by Giulio Ber-

ruti and written by Giulio Berruti with Alberto Tarallo. It was banned for some years but has recently been released on DVD, a high-quality release being available from Blue Underground. It is an intriguing Nunsploration film as it mixes the genre with Giallo and is marked by excellent performances all round and a rather impressive rock music score.



It features the beautiful Anita Ekberg as Sister Gertrude, who is recovering from surgery. Sister Gertrude is worried that she is being rushed back to work by her Mother Superior and not given time to recuperate, but her complaints are swept aside. Sister Gertrude soon finds she cannot cope and becomes addicted to pain killers and begins to spiral out of control.

She expels Dr. Patrick Roland (Joe Dallesandro) and subdues Sister Matthieu by initiating a lesbian relationship with her. Now having the hospital under her total control, all hell breaks loose.

She inflicts humiliating calisthenics on a group of elderly patients, stomps on an old woman's dentures and when she finds an old man having sex with a nurse she throws him out a window!

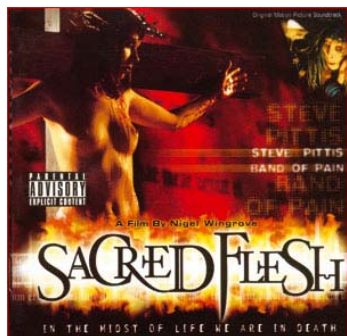
While on one hand she reads torturous accounts of the lives of the Saints to the patients, she regularly slips into town for booze and any sort of sex she can get.

Anita Strindberg as Sister Gertrude



As the body count rises, the Mother Superior puts the blame at the feet of the now psychotic Sister Gertrude, but is she really responsible, or is someone covering their tracks and trying to frame her for the various murders.

A person of some significance in regards to Nunsplotation is Nigel Wingrove of Redemption films, England. He first examined the genre in his short film *Visions of Ecstasy* (1989) which was the first film banned in the UK on the grounds of Blasphemy. In it he explored Saint Teresa of Ávila caressing the body of Jesus on the cross as she becomes aroused and enflamed! He later followed this in 1999 with *Sacred Flesh*.



Many of the current titles distributed by Salvation films are Nunsplotation and their own series *Satanic Sluts* includes nuns in a range of fetishistic depictions. (Salvation Films: <http://salvation-films.com>)

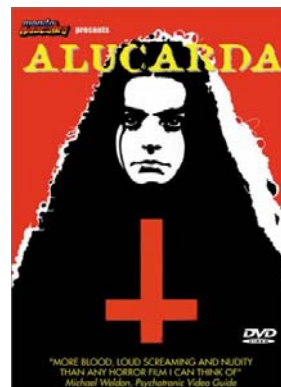
Nunsplotation is not isolated to "Eurotrash" cinema and indeed is found across cultures. There are quite a few titles from Mexico including *Satanico Pandemonium*, Gilberto Martinez Solares (1975), *Alucarda*, Juan López Moctezuma (1978) and from Poland, such as *Behind the Convent Walls* aka *Interno di un convent* Walerian Borowczyk (1978).

Alucarda is a prime example of Mexican Nunsplotation, Directed by Juan Lopez Moctezuma and released in 1978, there is a superb DVD edition from Mondo Macabro.

Alucarda is a very adult work of horror entertainment which looks like a cross between a Ken Russell film and *The Exorcist*. It is wickedly entertaining, surreal and full of excessive scenes; bizarre, humourous as well as blasphemous dialogue and a heavily sexualized approach to Nunsplotation. The sets and costumes are quite astounding, the chapel has a strange cave-like appearance and the nun's outfits are more like the bindings of a mummy than traditional clothing. This is a beautifully filmed work which is filled with strange and compelling imagery.

The director Juan Lopez Moctezuma had a close relationship with Aleandrjo Jodorowsky

and Fernando Arrabel – and was closely involved in what became known as the Panic Movement. The Panic movement was inspired by the god Pan and influenced by the work of Luis Buñuel and Antonin Artaud. It was a deliberate revolt against what was seen as the degeneracy of surrealism. The Panic Movement believed Surrealism had become the plaything of the bourgeois and that only through cinema that shocked and confronted could the movement be saved. While Jodorowsky dissolved the movement in 1973 many films, including *Alucarda*, show its influence. The combination of deliberately confronting and shocking imagery with surrealism certainly offers a unique visual experience.



The film opens with the birth of a child, who is entrusted to a local gypsy to protect her life. Some fifteen years later we meet Alucarda as young girl who is trying to be part of the life of a convent but finding herself at odds with nearly everything they do and teach. She constantly wears black clothing and seems melancholic to say the least.

She has made friends with Justine, who is only in the convent as her parents have died and she has nowhere else to go. They become very close friends (ahh ! the joys of young lesbian love) and rather than taking to the austere lifestyles required of a nun, they spent inordinate amounts of time in the woods together doing what young girls do.

Young, beautiful and very disturbed...





One day they meet a very strange gypsy, who offers to read Alucarda's palm and tell her what the future holds. However, as the gypsy reads her palm, the gypsy suddenly looks away in horror and mumbles indecipherable but ominous comments about what is in store, which terrifies Alucarda. However, Justine promises to stand by her and after some sort of past life experience they open a coffin in an abandoned chapel and a strange eerie noise is heard. It seems that opening the coffin has unleashed a randy and uncontrollable spirit which takes hold of Alucarda. Time and time again Alucarda feels like she has done this all before and due to the force of these flashbacks she begins to become possessed.

By this stage things are getting pretty weird. The gypsy appears in their room and using a dagger, pricks their breasts and forces them to drink each other's blood. Alucarda is now totally possessed and doesn't take being in the convent lightly. During a scripture class, in a rather fun scene, Justine and Alucarda mock the nun in charge and begin to loudly praise Satan. Justine collapses while Alucarda attacks Father Lázaro during confession. These are great girls to have around.

Father Lázaro seems to have been educated in a rather Medieval tradition and is a priest steeped in the forbidden knowledge of demonology. He immediately comes to the conclusion that *"it's a heliophobic demon! That's a sixth-category devil who hates light!"* and starts preparing for an exorcism.

No use wasting time with pesky second opinions, even the advice of the convent's doctor that the girls are sick and not possessed is conveniently ignored. Who needs medicine when god is on your side !



As you do in an exorcism, Justine is stripped naked and tied to a cross. She is then pierced with needles while Alucarda--also tied up--can do nothing. When she yells and screams in protest, she is knocked out. The doctor arrives and with the only voice of reason in this mad world of religious excess denounces the stupidity and hysteria of the convent, but Justine is dead and the possessed Alucarda is very pissed off.

Now it seems the undead somehow enter the equation. Justine's corpse is nowhere to be found and one of the nuns has been burnt to death. Father Lázaro, taking a leap in faith, and for no apparent reason, chops the head off the poor nun's corpse, which then reanimates writhing and screaming. As they search for Alucarda they find Justine lying naked in a coffin filled to the brim with blood; she returns to life.

The doctor, now convinced of the power of the cross, throws holy water on her and she starts to burn but in her final death throws she tears out Sister Angelica's throat, a damn good showing I must say.

Alucarda now runs amok tormenting the nuns and monks in the convent as the possessed tend to do. Monastics are bursting into flame spontaneously and the cave-like chapel and building is shaking with statues crashing to the ground. Sister Angelica's body is returned to the convent and held in a Christ-like pose which for some reason confronts Alucarda, who dies with her body vanishing into thin air !

Alucarda has superb cinematography, amazing sets, stunning costumes, witty and cutting dialogue filled with humour and blasphemy, solid character development (Alucarda is a real charmer) and a plot which will have your scratching your head for quite some time after you watch it.

One may suppose that the prime locations for Nunsplotation films would be where Catholicism is the most powerful and generally this is correct. There is one unusual exception, Japan.

While in Japan Catholicism is a minority religion, there is an obsession with fetishism and hence the imagery of school girls and nuns is used in a more sexualized manner. The Nunsplotation films of Japan are usually marked by their explicitness and emphasis on sado-masochism, bondage and related shenanigans.

Classic titles include Norifumi Suzuki's *School of the Holy Beast* (1974), Nobuaki Shirai's *Nun Story: Frustration in Black* (1980) and Mamoru Watanabe's *Rope of Hell: A Nun's Story* (1981).

Japan has also produce a wide range of Hentai (adult anime) titles featuring Nunsplotation themes, a prime example being the anime series *Dark Chapel* (2006) aka *Seikoujyo Sei Kojo*.



Nunsplotation continues to be a significant theme within the exploitation genre today, two excellent examples being *Run, Bitch, Run* and *Bad Habits*.

Run, Bitch, Run is an amalgam of exploitation themes include rape-revenge, catholic school girls and Nunsplotation. While it is not an explicitly Nunsplotation film, as one of the major characters constantly watches Nunsplotation films and the focus is on two Catholic school girls it gets pretty damn close. Read our review in the last issue of Synergy or see it on our website. You can also visit the movies website at:

<http://www.runbitchrunmovie.com>



Bad Habits (<http://www.dankfilms.com.au>) is an Australian Nunsplotation film with a lot going for it. It follows in the tradition of *Killer Nun* but with its own unique take on the genre. It is a stylish, gritty low budget exploration of the life of Sister Marie Fenche, a nun bordering on the brink. It has the look of film noir presented with dark



A very annoyed Sister Marie

skies, moody music and an urban aesthetic that is extremely appealing.

"I thought you were married to God ?

Sister Marie: *God and I have an open relationship"*

Sister Marie has some problems. She is plagued with insomnia, has a drug addiction and finds life a constant bore. Her faith has little influence on her everyday experience and she takes affection where she can get it. She is dominating, aggressive and very unstable.

She roams the street at night drinking booze, having sex and having increasingly surreal experiences. One night she goes home with a mysterious stranger only to wake up and find him with his throat cut in the bathtub and her name written in blood on the wall. Is she the killer or is another game afoot ?

The more she tries to unravel what is occurring to her, the more bizarre things become as she encounters all manner of unusual and eccentric characters including the enigmatic but potentially dangerous James Bishop.

This is an extremely effective and intriguing film; Sandra Casa is sultry and just plain dangerous as Sister Marie and all the cast put in excellent performances.

The soundtrack is atmospheric and the cinematography is exceptional. I certainly found *Bad Habits* a classic example of the high quality cinema that can be achieved on when a limited budget is overcome with bucket loads of creativity and innovation.

With films such as *Run, Bitch, Run* and *Bad Habits*, there is clearly a lot of weirdness to explore in Nunsplotation yet !

CULT FILMS

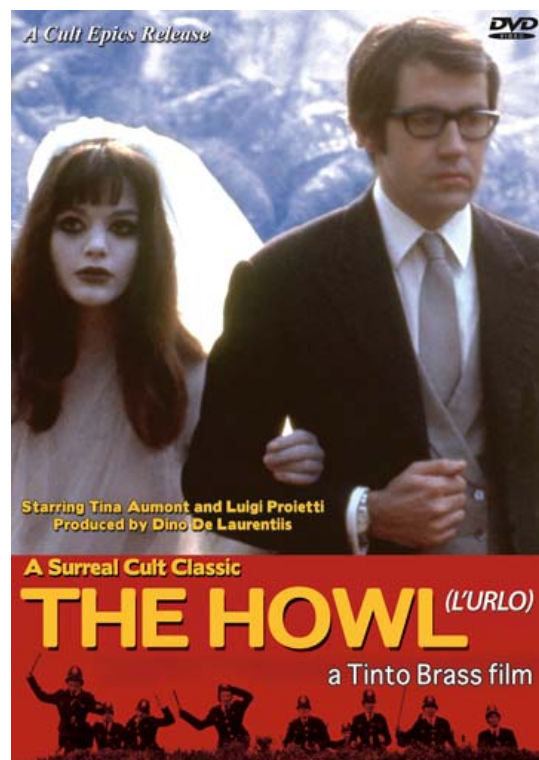


The Howl
Tinto Brass
Cult Epics
R0 NTSC
Web: <http://www.cultepics.com>

The Howl aka *L'Urlo* (1968) is a startling and original work directed by Tinto Brass and produced by Dino De Laurentis. Cult Epics have restored the print to the uncensored version which represents the director's original vision and this offers a wild and surreal ride into the anarchism which was the Sixties. Sex, violence, anarchy and rebellion, it is all here in spades presented in a non linear storyline which reminds me of Jodorowsky (*Holy Mountain* and *El Topo*).

Tinto Brass later become celebrated, if not notorious, for his erotic work (*Frivolous Lola* (*Monella*), *Cheeky!* (*Transgredire*) and many others. A selection are available from Cult Epics). In this film there is certainly an abundance of all manner of sex, but it is juxtaposed with violence, images of oppression and a bizarre semi-poetic commentary and hence is very different from his later films.

The Howl was shot without a script and represents a true "stream of consciousness" approach to filmmaking where one idea is simply allowed to follow another and create a cinematic experience made of images and sensations



rather than of logic. Brass as offered to direct *A Clockwork Orange* but instead decided to create his own Sixties film and *The Howl* is the result.

According to Brass, the financiers of the film were horrified when they held what was in production so Brass and crew completed the film in London. The film caused such a furor with the Italian censors that it was banned for eight years.

Berto Bertuccioli is an important man; he works for a significant government department called the PPP though we are never told what the initials mean. He shows up at a police station to use his influence to get his girlfriend, Anita Annigoni, out of jail where she has been raped and beaten since her arrest at a demonstration. The police inspector hides in a strange white



box with bubble windows with a detached finger and photo spreads of murder and mayhem, Bertuccioli pays him off with drugs and Anita is released.

Bertuccioli proposes to Anita while she re-enacts the rape she experienced by the police, strangely she seems to have enjoyed it and may have even provoked her arrest for the experience. The rape motif continues throughout the film with a very confronting gang rape by a group of soldiers later on.

The wedding is planned for Sunday but during the surreal ceremony with some very eccentric characters Anita catches the eye of Coso, a rather strange character who carries a workman's box with him wherever he goes. Soon she has abandoned the marriage and begins a road trip with Coso. Coso seems to communicate with poetry and may or not be a criminal living beyond the law. In any event she finds he irresistible and they make love on the bus to the horror of the clergy travelling with them.

The road trip seems to be a symbolic journey through the madness of the world as perceived through the eyes of a Sixties anarchist. There are violent and oppressive authorities who slaughter everyone in sight, a priest who kills and rapes a woman in a train and a bourgeoisie couple out for a drive who treat the couple so bad they end up urinating on their windshield. But this is not all, not by a long short, there is a cannibalistic philosopher ruling over an empire in the woods who might live like a noble savage but will eat you for telling him so. There is a truly superb sex hotel where every possible perversion (and even a few you may not have thought of) is on display and readily available. Shall I continue ? A woman who has been crying for a hundred years, an insane asylum on an isolated and deserted island and let's not forget the field of hippies!

Brass creates a strange and wonderful road trip through a landscape which is both inner and outer. While we see an obvious critique of the establishment in all its forms; church, state, police and military, at the same time Brass intersperses an exploration of an internal psychological reality. This switching between dreams and reality, the world outside and the world of dreams, sex and desire creates a disorientating visual experience. This is accentuated by the use of all manner of stock footage, news broadcasts and extraneous images. The film was Brass' second collaboration with cinematographer Silvano Ippoliti and is always visually intriguing, if not at times, challenging.

The Howl is an unusual experience, overflowing with images, bereft of a traditional plot and yet fascinating and seductive. It is well worth the experience.



¡MALDITO BASTARDO!

Datura Films

Web: <http://www.malditobastardo.net>

Spanish with English and French Subtitles

We have all heard the strange and wonderful tales told around a fireplace, especially those which have been told and told again until they have reached truly mythic proportions.



Fonsiño was bored so his grandfather decided to tell him a tale; and what a tale it is! It is the type of saga suited to a cold night when the dark is encroaching on the doorstep and you need a good scare. It is a story filled with sex, death and madness, lots and lots of madness. When Fonsiño seems to doubt the veracity of his grandfather recollections, his grandmother takes over and the tale veers into true insanity.

There are mechanical edible animals who wander the forest and live for hundreds of years, a giant Swiss straw man, a plush deity called Father Bear who is the second son of God and not



to forget Christian 1.0 the robot !

The story focuses on Dr Natalio who runs a dilapidated hospital . It is packed with semi naked subjects whom he has injected with rabies, shocked, lobotomized and experimented on. He abuses everyone around him and beats his nurse. Under pressure she accidentally injects a patient with insulin and kills him and then injects the diabetic doctor with the fatal infection he has been working on.

At the same time we are treated to the tale of a simple family who live in the forest. Alvarito is a man-child who likes to blow things up, he is dominated by his fearsome and violent mother Florentina. Florentina is a visionary who has an experience with God and has come to believe that Father Bear (a plush toy) is the second son of the divine !

She keeps him in a shrine made of a smashed television and bits and pieces she has found in the forest. She teaches Alvarito the facts of life such as do not believe in solidarity and progress, be wary of all foreigners and endure pain at all costs.



Natalios and Alvaritos lives intersect when the doctor finds the solution to his infection in an old alchemical tome. He has forty eight hours to find a simpleton and extract their bodily fluids to make a cure. He sends a telegram to Florentina offering Alvarito a job and things go downhill from there.

There are rapes, sodomy, zombies, murders and lots more. This is a bizarre low budget cult film which makes up for its obviously limited budget with sheer exuberance and creativity.

Sure, at times, the acting is a bit uneven and the plot seems a bit insane, but its surreal nature is what really gets you in.

The monsters are outrageous from the Swiss straw man who is clearly a guy covered in bags of straw to a very cool robot and a strange tree.

The monsters are clearly inspired by tin plate toys of the 1970's and add a camp feel to the aesthetic of the film. It is all so odd it ends up like a mad dark fairy tale for adults.

It has a great sense of humour and lots of ridiculous sub plots such as the unnamed pervert in the forest who likes to collect and make love to men's jackets !

Imaldito Bastardo is going to end up being a cult classic; it is so manic, frenetic and just plain bizarre that you will want to watch it a few times. You will end up shocked, amazed, amused and above all, entertained.

By the way, the title means Damn Bastard in English !

The Man Who Saves the World

Dünyayı kurtaran adam (1982)

Trash Palace

DVD-R Release

Web: <http://www.trashpalace.com>

The Man Who Saves the World is a Turkish made film which is now celebrated in the world of cult cinema as the Turkish Star Wars. It is also considered the most infamous Turkish rip-off film ever made. It was released in 1982 and directed by Çetin İnanç. Since Turkey was in the



midst of major political upheaval and budgets for films were not existent, Turkish versions of popular films were made using Turkish casts and settings with unique adaptations of the plot, not to mention borrowed content.

The Man Who Saves the World became infamous because of its notorious use of unauthorized Star Wars footage. The musical soundtrack is also entirely lifted from Western scores of the period including Raiders of the Lost Ark, Moonraker, Ben Hur, Flash Gordon, Battlestar Galactica, Planet of the Apes, Silent Running, The Black Hole and Psycho.

The story is not entirely clear, bringing together all sorts of fantasy and science fiction themes mixed with "borrowed" and stock footage, never mind low budget special effects, terrible acting and lots of biff.

The film opens with footage combining scenes from Star Wars footage mixed with both American and Soviet space footage, this is accompanied with a long winded narration giving the background to the truly momentous experience you are about to have. We are then introduced to the Turkish Darth Vader and his robot, an upside-down garbage with a water cooler on top and a police siren to top it off.

We then experience a wild space dogfight involving Murat and Ali (the Turkish Luke Skywalker and Han Solo). They are wearing motorcycle helmets and headphones





and sitting in front of TVs playing Star Wars footage. These are meant to represent spaceships but are not particularly convincing but are oh so much fun. Soon they crash land on Tatooine, a barren desert planet.

As Murat and Ali explore the planet, they begin to wonder if it is inhabited. One of them for some strange reason comes to believe it is solely populated by women and decides to whistle to attract them.

Sadly, he uses the wrong tone of whistle and instead attracts evil skeletons on horseback instead, who they defeat in rough and tumble hand to hand combat. They certainly can fight, they take out a dozen men on horses with flips and kicks in karate style while borrowed Indiana Jones music plays !

Of course there needs to be a supervillain and the Turkish Darth Vader appears next, capturing Murat and Ali aiming to turn them into gladiators to fight in his arena. It seems Darth Vader is actually a thousand year old wizard who originally hailed from earth. His goal is to bring the earth under his dominion but he is constantly defeated by an earth shield comprised of concentrated human brain molecules.

He hopes to use a human brain to destroy the shield and take over the earth. Luckily for the earth, our heroes escape and join a group of refugees fleeing the evil leader.

Here the second major theme of any movie enters the plot, the love story. Murat develops a relationship with Uçar, who is tasked with looking after the children. As Murat romances Uçar we are treated to the rather familiar sounding music of Raiders of the Lost Ark. But the romance does not last for long as evil mummies and monsters attack the cave and the children



end up being slaughtered. After death their bodies are transformed into mummies.

To celebrate their first fight Murat and Ali decide to do some training. This is the real deal folks no "use the force, Luke" here ! They kick the air, hit into rocks and then they start karate chopping right through boulders, one of which explodes.

Soon Murat, Ali and Uçar end up in a local bar, the cantina from Star Wars with extra monsters and scenes to boot ! The story gets weirder and weirder as it progresses with cardboard swords that look like lightning bolts being used instead of lightsabres, ridiculous macho fight sequences and monsters which have to be seen to be believed.

The film climaxes with the death of Ali and Murat planning to take revenge. He melts down a specially empowering space sword (a cardboard lightning bolt no less) to create a pair of gauntlets and boots with which he will save the earth and avenge his friends death. He comes face-to-face with the Turkish Darth and karate-chops him in half! We are then treated to a moving speech extolling the human brain as the most powerful weapon throughout the stars !

This is a truly insane cult cinema. The intense editing, the no budget production values, the borrowed footage, stolen soundtrack and creative adaptation of the Star Wars story makes this an absolute winner. You will never look at science fiction the same way again.

We were lucky enough to find an excellent DVD-R edition from Trash Palace, they have a superb range of rare, weird and unusual titles. Drop by and you will be astounded by what you find.

Trash Palace: <http://www.trashpalace.com>

No Right Turn Last Exit Productions

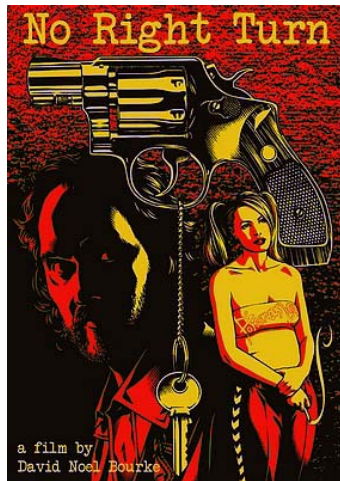
No right Turns opens with a dreamlike landscape. There is an old home surrounded by mist and lit by an abundance of candles. Monella sits alone in a large bath; she spins the chamber of a pistol and shots time and time again. The pace of the scene is leisurely, so every time the chamber turns and you hear a click you cringe – you want to look away but you can't. It is as close as you can get to a perfect scene, creating a fever pitch of tension and then rolling into the films opening credits which are accompanied by music which is reminiscent of a circus or sideshow.

This combination of a strange dreamlike quality, even a dark fairytale mixed with bleak reality is what marks No Right Turn throughout.

No Right Turn is the second film from Danish filmmaker David Noel Bourke who made Last Exit. It might be a low budget film made on the streets of Copenhagen but it doesn't look it. The cinematography is superb, the acting is professional and credible and the plot impressive.

What I especially like is the way in which the film takes its time developing a range of truly eccentric and unusual characters and then slowly intertwines them together to offer an intriguing tale. All of the characters are quirky and a little weird, but they are kept believable so at no time does the film lose authenticity. No Right Turn

Monella playing Russian Roulette



seems to mix Film Noir with a cult sensibility matching a dark sense of humour to an incredible music score.

Johnny is a coke junkie who has snorted so much that his septum is damaged and his nose is constantly in pain. He is becoming increasingly greedy and is unhappy being a drug courier delivering drugs via pizza boxes; it is through his deliveries we meet a lot of the major characters. The combination of drugs and alcohol are making him delusional and paranoid and he becomes convinced his big break will come if he buys Pedro's sleazy knockshop. However, there is a hitch, he is unsure of his future as he thinks his wife is having an affair.

His wife Nina is an ex-porn star who has, in her words, had sex with everything and anything. She is seriously jaded and manipulative. She is sick of her husband's drunken excesses and low career options and develops a close friendship (and a bit more) with the emotionally distraught Monella. Nina has decided to rob her husband and make a new life and brings Monella in on the plan. As Johnny spirals out of control, their lives begin to intertwine and we know a disaster is in store.

From the very moment the film opens the suspense begins and it continues right to the very end. This process of manipulating tension makes this a superb film which is both visually artistic and yet filled with grit and realism. From the strange wings Monella finds in the snow to Johnny using meat on a string under his nose to alleviate the pain caused by too many drugs, the bizarre imagery creates a powerful impression.

The mixture of affection and trust, such as between Monella and Nina, is counterbalanced with the life Nina leads which include a near rape and the brutality of her husband. The world of No Right Turn is one of opposites, grit, pain and violence, trust and affection, dreams and visions and gritty street life. It is quite an experience.

This is a film which will keep you enthralled right to the very end and really embodies what indie filmmaking should be.

Last Exit Productions
www.lastexitproductions.dk

WORLD CINEMA



Absurdistan
First Run Features 2008
R1 DVD

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

Subtitled in English



High in the Caucasus mountains of Europe is a little village peopled by descendants of the valiant fighters who stopped the Mongol invaders many centuries ago. Water is precious here and the village water supply comes through an old and rickety pipeline from an underground river in a cave higher up in the mountains. This pipeline was built a long time ago at the cost of a number of lives and now it is rusted and damaged. The water supply is drying up. The men of the village are, well, not exactly lazy, but would rather spend their days in the tearoom discussing their prowess with their women than fix the pipeline. The women carry on as best they can. Life in the village is slow but not unpleasant, until the water finally stops flowing. Even then the men will not fix the pipeline, but resort to all sorts of desperate measures to substitute for water. The village gradually becomes dirty and its people begin to smell.

A young couple, Aya and Temelko, are to marry the next time the constellations of Virgo and Sagittarius appear in the sky. Before this can happen Aya and her grandmother lead the women in a revolt against the men – no water, no sex. Since Temelko is the only mechanically-minded person in the village it will be up to him to fix the pipeline, restore the water, and defuse the revolt. He is willing to do this but first he



must overcome the stubbornness of the men who will not give in to the women. Their very masculinity is at stake here.

The conflict that follows is a battle of wills, guile, and cheating to get past the ban. It looks like Temelko and Aya's marriage may not take place as the constellations are now in alignment. They will only stay this way for six days and as it comes down to the last day it will take all Temelko's skills to not only get the water running again but to reconcile the men and the women.

Veit Helmer has directed a wonderful little low-key comedy that shows beautifully the simple lives and surroundings of the mountain people. He takes a sly dig at the habit of the men treating the women as little more than slaves, but does so in a way that suggests that everyone is content with the arrangement most of the time. The closeness of the villagers is well brought out as is their happy nature in what should be a harsh and depressing environment. Perhaps Giorgi Beridze's skilled cinematography is what makes the difference here. He shows the mountain country in its harsh, dry reality, but softens the picture with the clear golden light.

It took Helmer some years to find the right location for the film until he looked at the little village of Lahic in Azerbaijan. Its old buildings and cobbled streets are perfect for the mood of the film. The isolation of the village raised special problems. Into a village of around 70 people he had to fit a film crew of an extra 90. Everything had to be brought in over roads that were often impassable. Even set builders had to be taught first, because Azerbaijan does not have a film

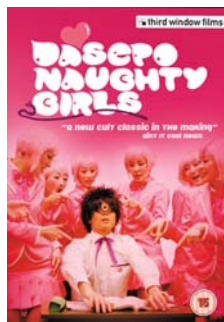
industry. The film is very visual so it works with a surprisingly small amount of dialogue and subtitling. Temelko narrates a little of the story to get it going but after that it largely supports itself. This requires a lot more skill of the actors but they do it well. The lack of snappy dialogue doesn't hinder the film – rather, it enhances the simple nature of the comedy.

Absurdistan is a sweet, happy little comedy about the battle of the sexes. It's a love story, it verges a little on the absurd, but you know it will all turn out OK in the end. I loved it.

Dasepo Naughty Girls
2007
Korea
Third Window Films

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

Korean, subtitled in very bad English



This happy little spoof is all the better for being translated from Korean. It is a cross between *Debbie Does Dallas* and *High School Musical*, with that special “lost a bit in translation” touch that makes it even funnier. It was based on a Korean online comic and its origins show. Each character gets their little episode, and they all intertwine in a show that gets progressively more bizarre as it goes on. It never loses its comedy touch, though, and its brightly-coloured candyfloss look.

In confronts that awkward question faced by poor schoolgirls – should I become a prostitute to buy my little brother a new pair of sneakers? Along the way there will be many discoveries and challenges.

The English teacher at Useless High School has syphilis. Most of the class, including the boys, find urgent reasons for going to the doctor. The only one who missed out is Cyclops, the one-eyed bastard. Will he find love in spite of his deformity? What about his sister, who has a penis?

Your father is Pure Blossom, the nympho teenage girl who never quite reveals all on the internet chat sites.

Is it appropriate to whip your teacher on his backside because he failed to teach you that football originated in Korea?

True love is when the girl pays for the hotel

room.

Why do girls prefer white panties?

Life can be confusing for a schoolboy planning a career when the TV advertises “You like other men? Come join the military”

The songs are just as confusing

A gushing young spirit hi hi
No Use High
Wisely chip, polish and oil,
Shining wisdom
Become the rain on the land of the people

Even allowing for losing a lot in translation, this is truly weird. The school also has classes for Moslems, Buddhists, Hare Krishna, and enthusiastic hand-clapping Catholics.

How hard can it be to lose your virginity? Pretty hard when your customer is the local crime boss, Big Razor Sis, who prefers to cross-dress as a 200 pound schoolgirl and be photographed with you as his / her girlfriend and play schoolgirls together. Things turn nasty when one of the schoolgirls is kidnapped by the Erotic Realm nightclub to be a virgin sacrifice. The bumbling henchmen also accidentally kidnap the crime boss in his schoolgirl outfit. Our schoolgirl heroine, however, discovers a talent for erotic dancing and she and Big Razor Sis escape when the crime boss sacrifices his beloved yellow panties to the sex-crazed crowd.

There is, of course, a love story. Will our young heroine find love with the handsome Swiss exchange student? Or is he really her adopted-out brother? Or will the evil school Principal get to her and install his Instant Virgin chip in her?

The school Principal, of course, is an agent of the even-more-evil Eemuki, a snake Goddess from the Erotic Realm. Fortunately the goddess can be defeated by the “Forces of Yang”, a mass masturbation ceremony, which the students seem to be familiar with. After that, it only remains for all the loose ends to be sorted out and to have the compulsory end-of-school musical number.

It could be just another piece of high-school fluff but instead it's a hilarious mature comedy that goes where American school comedies wouldn't dare. I loved it.

Web: <http://www.thirdwindowfilms.com>

L'Important C'est D'Aimer
Mondo Vision
R1 DVD

Mondo Vision offers the first ever North American release of Andrzej Zulawski's *L'Important C'est D'Aimer* (The Important Thing Is To Love, 1975) in a gorgeous new transfer, uncut and uncensored with all new English subtitles supervised and approved by director Andrzej Zulawski. It is a masterful edition, superbly restored and offering the original mono French soundtrack with white or yellow subtitles as well as an English or German dub. Personally, I think the original French is the only way to go ! The restoration and remastering cannot be faulted and indeed some of it was even done by hand. It is a pristine edition and the depth of the colours and the beauty of the cinematography are only enhanced by the incredible job done by Mondo Vision. There are also some great extras including an informative feature length audio commentary with director Andrzej Zulawski and writer Daniel Bird and a video interview with Andrzej Zulawski.

Andrzej Zulawski's films are surprising, beautiful, surreal and at times shocking. Many of his later films follow a much wilder trajectory and are, while fascinating, difficult to follow in any lineal sense. *L'Important C'est D'Aimer* is unusual in that while it has a very straight-forward storyline, it is populated with such eccentric and unusual characters that it creates a truly masterful presence. It is filled with curious ideas, emotionally charged scenes and cinematography which puts you in the centre of each scene.



The concept of love in this film is very different from the sort of sentimental tales found in Hollywood. It is a love which carries within it the seed of not only its own self destruction but the obliteration of those around it. The characters here are clearly damaged, life has not treated them well and hence their search for love carries with it all sorts of emotional turmoil, intellectual scars and painful memories. They live the way they do or necessity and survival and simply accept suffering as part of the course.

The nexus of the film is the story of a struggling actress, Nadine Chevalier (Romy Schneider), who makes a living in adult films, her obsessive and eccentric collector husband (Jacques Dutronc) and a dark and moody photographer Servais Mont (Fabio Testi). Mont has snuck onto the set of her latest film and while grabbing some shots falls instantly in love with her. Soon a dangerous and obsessive love triangle develops between them as each tries to resist the fatal consequences of the emotions which are developing. Mont decides to help Nadine get into a "real play" and invests in an insane version of *Richard III*, to do so he must borrow money from the mob and make underground XXX films for them as payment.

Richard III stars none other than Klaus Kinski. Kinski as the flamboyant, bi sexual Karl-Heinz Zimmer is startling as are so many characters in this film; it is populated by porn makers, gay sex workers, gangsters, a poetic drunk who dies with Rimbaud on his lips and more.

It is the sub plots and back stories which create such a superb texture to the film. It does not feel convoluted or strained and yet is filled with all sorts of tales about the characters which inhabit this strange world. The characters are superbly developed and you feel immense sympathy for the three leads.



Each of the main characters have their own unusual perception of the world. Jacques sleeps with his shoes on, speaks in riddles, makes a small living running a film magazine and selling movie paraphernalia and lives in a state of constant emotional debasement to Nadine.

At the same time the quirky lesser characters add a real texture to the film from the perverse gangster who blackmails his patrons after taking photos at orgies to the drunk who lives surrounded by books and dies reciting Rimbaud.

The wit and dialogue is fast paced and intelligent and the score by Georges Delerue (Contempt, Shoot the Piano Player and lots of others) is luxurious and at times quite beautiful. It is haunting, passionate and helps create the strange mood which envelops the film from beginning to end.

This is a sad and enigmatic film filled with truly memorable scenes and a climax which certainly proves that love does not always lead to happiness.

Man of Iron (1981)
Mr.Bongo Films 2009
R2 DVD

Reviewer:
 Bob Estreich

Polish subtitled in English

Poland, the 1980s. The independent trade union Solidarity is leading strikes in full force against the entrenched Communist regime and has ignored the official government trade union. Winkel, a reporter for the state broadcasting system, has been ordered by the Ministry to do a slander job on Maciek Tomczyk, a strike leader in the Gdansk shipyards.



The manager of the shipyards confides to Winkel that they're going to "nail his arse to the wall" and under no circumstances will the Party and its police state allow any form of power-sharing with the workers.



They have a dossier on Tomczyk listing such crimes as hooliganism and violating social rules. The police are well organized even though they admit that the Comrades at the top have screwed everything up. Things are moving too fast for Winkel. He has been provided with the dossier on Tomczyk, now he is expected to make a major propaganda item of it. He has contacts in Gdansk from the previous general strike in 1970.

Not everyone is happy with the strikers since the strike is causing hardship, food shortages and transport problems. Nor are they happy with the State-sponsored union that has given them "ten years of work without a holiday". Generally they regard the State union with the same contempt as they regard the Central Committee. For this reason the Committee is reluctant to come down too hard on the strikers in case the strike turns into full revolution. People think the strike will peter out as Walesa's Solidarity committee is simply talked to death by the establishment.

Winkel starts investigating the situation for himself, not sticking to the State line. He is only human and he knows that if he gets too deeply involved in the strike he could be jailed. He is a borderline alcoholic and the strike Committee has banned alcohol sales so Winkel is a bit disoriented and uncertain where his loyalties lie.

An old friend shows him an illegal film of the 1970 general strike that was broken up ruthlessly by the Party. It reminds him that what is happening now is little different to what happened then.



The government could crack down on the strikers at any time and in desperation they could be just as violent as before. Are they likely to give in?

In Gdansk the shipyard workers are the key to political power. Winkel is told that in 1970 the shipyard, led by Tomczyk's father, did not come out in favour of the strike. Now with his son leading the workers it will be different. Winkel is reminded of Tomczyk's early life through a series of flashbacks, including his hospitalization in a psychiatric ward when he could not accept the formation of the State union that defused the strike in 1970. He dropped out of sight for a year and then reappeared with a job in the shipyard. Winkel knows some of the background but not enough.

As the crisis builds he continues to trace Tomczyk's life and finds that he has been a political agitator for many years. Although many workers agree they are being deprived of decent pay and working conditions they remember the lessons of the earlier strike and are reluctant to join with Tomczyk.

He is something of an outcast among his own people but this is changing as more and more workers are affected by the depressed conditions and rising prices.

Finally the moment Winkel has been waiting for arrives. The suspicious strikers allow him inside the shipyard to see and hear their side of the story. The Committee is aware of it too, and wants names and details.

Can Winkel hold out against them if he decides to support the workers? Will he be caught up in the purge that seems to

be coming closer every day.

He is unhappy about being an informer, he is less happy when the strikers do not believe him about the coming purge. Which way will he turn

The film is more than just a propaganda piece and more than a history. As Winkel interviews more people the details of the police state in the 1970s start to emerge from the point of view of ordinary people. Genuine news footage is cut into the film to relive those days

and the terror of having tanks in the streets is clearly shown.

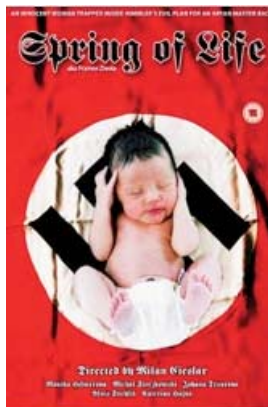
A young man was shot in the 1970 troubles. His family picked up his body from the morgue and buried him, but two weeks later his body had disappeared and the grave was used for another burial. Police thugs paid regular visits to those they regarded as dangerous and trashed their homes. Beatings under interrogation were standard practice. It is against this background of dissatisfaction among the common people that the Gdansk workers have finally come out on strike, led by Lech Walesa. This time they want unity of Poland without a Communist hierarchy. This can only be achieved with free open elections.

To those of us who live in relatively peaceful democratic countries it is hard to imagine living in a country where institutionalised hypocrisy is the standard method for keeping the masses under control. As recent events in the U.S. have shown Governments can and will lie to their people. This film is a timely reminder of how hard it can be to undo the damage.



The Spring of Life Redemption Films R0 DVD

The Spring of life aka Pramen Zivota is based on a little known aspect of Nazi life during World War II, the creation of the Lebensborn, breeding farms for creating racially pure Aryan children. It is based on a true story from a well respected novelist, Vladimír Körner.



Released in 2000 and directed by Milan Cieslar, this is a sensitive exploration of a little explored aspect of the Third Reich. It could have so easily slipped into exploitation yet it is presented as a moving historical dream, superbly filmed and beautifully acted. It is filled with poetic yet at times chilling images which will stay with you long after watching it.

Gretchen is a very young Czech peasant woman who lives a difficult life. Her mother has just died and she lives with her father in poverty in a small village. In 1939 the occupying Germans begin to look among the local girls for "Aryan stock". Before she knows it she is recognized as someone special. At first she is flattered as her work load at the local factory is reduced and she is treated differently to others. While is uncomfortable with some of the resentment she sees among her friends, the honour of her professional overwhelms any doubts. Soon she is given the "racial all clear" to go to a Polish spa town for education and development. It all seems so exciting and everyone tells her she is so privileged, but as she sees hints of brutality around her she begins to wonder the true motivation behind the offer.

In the "Lebensborn" she is groomed to give birth to the master race and it is here that we are given a fascinating insight into the strange worldview of National Socialism.

It is the first film I have seen exploring the bizarre pagan-Christian amalgam that was the basis of Nazi belief and which was the foundation of the Lebensborn program. It is visually stunning and really captures the strange pagan rites used to celebrate this fertility program.

Gretchen becomes more and more concerned with the brutality and injustice she sees around her and when her escape attempt is thwarted

decides to undermine their program. Having taken a shine to a local Polish lad she develops a relationship

with him and falls pregnant. Sadly she does not realize that her assigned partner is well aware of this dalliance and uses it to his own advantage. Leo is killed and her chance at romance destroyed as she is assigned to a work camp. Even when freed she cannot find her child and returns to her village, older, sadder and definitely wiser.



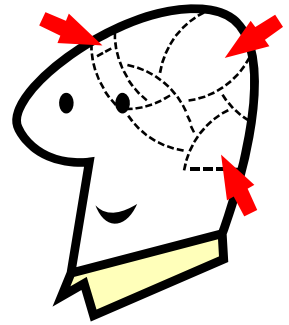
This is an intelligent exploration of the seductive power of the Third Reich. We take a journey with Gretchen, who being poor and uneducated, sees the Nazis as a ticket out of her village. The more she compromises herself, however, the more she realizes that she is losing who she is. This is not a simple "black and white" film with easy answers; it explores the complexity of what occurred in small community where National Socialism seemed to offer an answer to their difficult lives. It also examines the various motives of those involved in the Lebensborn program.

The cinematography is simply stunning and the film is loaded with symbolism and imagery. The spring of life, for example, is the limited water supply in the local village, while later; the image is transformed to become the fertility of the girls in the Lebensborn. The figure of the Virgin Mary (in image, prayer and reference) is used throughout to compare the legend of a virgin giving birth to the divine with the Nazi program of selected "Aryan virgins" giving birth to the master race. The only fault I can find with the film is the slightly ponderous score used throughout; a lighter touch may have been a little more successful.

There are some great extras on the DVD including an exclusive documentary on the Lebensborn program by Michael Leapman, author of Master Race and Witnesses to War and a series of archives offering rarely seen Third Reich and Lebensborn documents.

THINKING

TIME!



The Bible Unearthed
The Making of a Religion
2005
Icarus Films
First Run Features
R1 DVD

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

If you are the sort of person who blindly believes that the Bible is the literal word of God, don't bother reading this review. If, however, you wonder whether the Bible stories are accurate then this DVD is worth watching. It highlights errors, political interpretations and simplifications of the old oral legends on which the early Bible is based. Could the stories be feasible? If not, do they fit better into another time period? The stories are compared one by one against the archaeological evidence and the authors attempt to explain the discrepancies and suggest more accurate time lines.

The first five books of the Bible, called the Pentateuch, are the basis for three of the world's major religions – Islam, Judaism and Christianity. The Bible has been used to justify wars, genocide, slavery, suppression of science and countless power struggles so it is important that its limitations be understood.

The Patriarchs

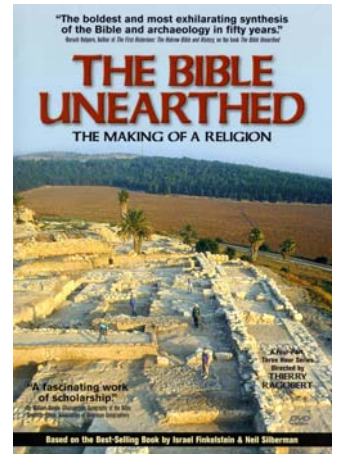
The Pentateuch or the Torah in Judaism sets out the history of what became the Jewish people. The first chapter of the DVD deals with the Patriarchs, Abraham, Jacob and Isaac. It rather wisely ignores the fanciful Genesis but concentrates on the tribes that became what is now Israel.

For two thousand years the books were regarded as the literal truth. In the 1900s this was being questioned due to many of its obvious inconsistencies, which included the relationship of the patriarchs themselves. "Biblical archaeology" was designed to examine on the ground the histories described in the Pentateuch. Its intent was to prove that the Bible was a reliable record. Christian scholars roamed the Biblical lands "with a spade in one hand and a Bible in

the other", finding all the supporting proof they wanted without being too critical of the quality of the evidence. After all, they knew what had happened, they just wanted corroboration.

By the 1960s the inconsistencies had accumulated to the point that the whole Bible was being reexamined as a scholarly field rather than a religious one by less biased archaeologists and historians. The Bible, for instance has it that Abraham set out from the Tigris-Euphrates area of Mesopotamia around 1000 BC and moved into the area of Canaan (now part of Israel). This area was not uninhabited, so the assertion that God gave this land to Abraham and his heirs looks a bit thin – politically motivated perhaps?

The remains of the city of Megiddo provide a continuous record for some centuries. It was already a thriving walled city in 1000 BC, the center of commerce and agriculture for the area. Could a group of wandering sheep- and goat-herders have really claimed this land? There were many other city-states, both in Mesopotamia and in Canaan. Was it OK to destroy these cities and slaughter their inhabitants? Yes, provided the story said they were evil and it was really God's punishment. Megiddo has layers of ash and burnt material showing that destruction did occur. Radio carbon dating can pinpoint when this occurred with some accuracy. It does not agree with the Biblical date. This and other new evidence found by less religion-biased scientists now suggests that Abraham's migration would have to have happened at least 1000 years earlier when the area was more sparsely settled. Much of the earlier "research" and beliefs would have to be





tians were dedicated record keepers so the rise of a foreign slave to a position of power would be recorded somewhere. So far no such record has been found. In fact so far there is only one mention of Israel known. It describes the destruction of Israel (at this stage Israel would just have been a tribal area) when Egypt took over the Canaan area. The Egyptian date however is far earlier than

that in the Biblical record.

reevaluated. The attempts to place Abraham into an already documented historic context fail in the face of the newer evidence. This problem of misdating occurs through much of the Bible and is highlighted many times. In fact, sorting out the dates is a major part of the documentary..

The documentary tries to provide more logical time scales for the events listed in the Pentateuch and to test the stories against archaeological evidence from other sources. It becomes obvious that the Bible is a set of oral legends finally written down when the primitive herders learned to read and write. It also seems they brought some of their own legends from the Tigris – Euphrates area and included them in their oral tribal histories as well as absorbing some of the preexisting local legends as their own. Neither of these approaches match actual dates or time periods, as the archaeology shows.

The evidence suggests a date of around the seventh century BC as the most likely time the books were finally put into writing. Between 2000 BC (Abraham's arrival) and 700 BC (the legends are written down) there was much revision of the stories. Many have been politicised at some time to strengthen the importance of patriarchs of particular tribes or major events. Again the documentary consults the archaeological record to critically assess these stories.

Archaeological research on the people shown in Egyptian rock engravings and carvings shows many foreign clothing styles and facial features. It was a major trade and political centre. The carvings also record famines in the non-Nile areas caused by drought, and Egypt took in many new workers from its provinces at these times. The Pentateuch describes how a new king of Egypt became nervous of the number of Israelites in his country and turned what had been welcome agricultural workers into slaves. There is some archaeological verification of this and they may have been forced into building the Egyptian city of Tanis.

The Biblical story now turns to Moses and the conflict between Yahweh, the God of Moses, and the Pharaoh who was himself a living God of the Egyptians. The hostility led to the flight of the Israelites across the Red Sea. If the Biblical account is accurate then Egypt would have suffered a major economic downturn when a large part of its slave labour force walked out. There is no archaeological record of this happening.

A flight to the north around Sinai would be difficult as it was well garrisoned by the Egyptians. The southern route between the Sinai and

The Exodus

By this time the Israelites had apparently moved into Egypt. Although this has been traditionally taken to mean the Nile area it could also be a folk tale remembering the southern area of Canaan falling under the control of Egypt. The Bible tells of Joseph being sold into slavery in Egypt and rising in favour in Pharaoh's court. The Egyp-





Negev deserts is drier and more difficult, but the Bible documents how the Israelites indeed fled this way and stayed at the oasis of Kadesh-Barnea for forty years before entering their Holy Land. The tribe cannot have been very large as the oasis would not support a large population. This could also explain why their economic impact on Egypt was not great. According to the documentary the oasis has been thoroughly excavated twice, and no remains from the 13th century BC, the most likely period for the flight, have been found. Nor has evidence of the Exodus been found anywhere else in the Sinai despite many searches and military surveys. Other placenames along the path of the flight did not exist until long after the Bible records them. The tribe of Moses simply could not have conquered Canaan, as the Bible describes. Once more the story was written down much later than supposed and some poetic license was used or the dates were simply wrong. Again, the documentary shows that the Biblical stories are not supported by the archaeological evidence.

Around this time the northern kingdom of Israel was taken over by the Assyrians, leaving the southern kingdom of Judah as the only Israelite kingdom left. Jerusalem grew tenfold in population in this time due to the influx of refugees and was expanded and reinforced. In spite of this the Assyrians took over Judah as well. Surprisingly the tribute state then entered a period of economic growth. When the Assyrians left to deal with their own internal problems, Judah was actually in a better state than before. Its leaders determined to conquer

the northern kingdom of Israel and create a unified state.

According the Bible under the king Josiah a mysterious book, the Book of the Covenant, was miraculously discovered. It was attributed to Moses and was based largely on Moses' Ten Commandments. Josiah used it to justify centralising power, both government and religious (the two were intertwined) in Jerusalem. The Pentateuch books at this point become

rather political to justify the takeover of a friendly neighbour. The Covenant however became one of the foundations of Judaism. The story may be a fabrication. This is examined later.

The Kings

The Book of Joshua reaffirms God's promise to give the Israelites all the land of Canaan, justifying Joshua's reported conquering and genocide of the existing occupants. He formed a powerful army from all the tribes of Israel. City after city was destroyed and the archaeology verifies this destruction. It also raises doubts that the Biblical version is entirely accurate. Dating of the ruins of Jericho, for instance, show that at this time Jericho had no walls to come tumbling down. Other cities like Hazor and Megiddo were indeed destroyed but radio carbon dating shows that the destruction occurred over a much longer period than the Bible suggests.

Archaeology does not explain this. From clay cuneiform tablets found at Tel el-Amarna it becomes obvious that the Canaan city-states





nomads had to settle down and grow their own cereal food.

They were not monotheistic like their southern and low-land neighbours but many of their religious customs infiltrated the growing low-land religion (such as the ban on eating pork). They appear to have also worshipped Yahweh as one of their gods.

were once again vassals of Egypt, the dominant force in the area at the time. The regional center was at Beit Shean, and this is supported by archaeology. The Egyptians would resist any attempt by Joshua to take over the area, and the archaeology shows that they were still in control after Joshua's supposed conquest took place. The Joshua story therefore appears to be a literary fiction designed to set a starting point in the Israelite history of the land, and the story of the Covenant a convenient political justification. So if the destruction of the cities wasn't due to Joshua, how did it occur?

Although the Egyptians took control of the area again after the Assyrians, within a hundred years or so most of the city states were in ruins. Who destroyed them? Once again the documentary turns to Megiddo, whose preserved strata go back through at least twenty five city levels. A stele from around 1200BC says that the entire eastern Mediterranean was under attack at the time by an invading group of people who are hard to identify.

Each city or civilization had its own name for these invaders. In less than a century the "sea peoples" had taken over most of the coastal areas from the Egyptians. Inland in the higher areas another transformation took place. Although the area had poor soils and little water, the archaeology notes many small villages developing. There is no sign that this was done in any military way - they just sprang up to service small local populations as a result of the troubles in the lowlands.

These people were probably the first true Israelites, evolved from the original Bedouin inhabitants and the coastal refugees. Without the trade between the cities and the Bedouins (animal protein for cereals) the previous

It all started to come together with the introduction of writing in the seventh century BC. At this point all the legends, the laws and the history seem to have been decided on, complete with the absorbed legends of other tribes, the politically corrected versions, and the incorrect dates. Only just in time. When the Babylonians conquered the country the Jewish community was broken up, exiled or scattered. Judaism was the only common thread holding the people together. No further revision (or correction) of the book was possible.

It must be remembered that early Christianity was a Jewish religion, following many of its practices and beliefs. Gradually the Christian bishops asserted their independence and the religions drifted apart. Even the Christians, however, preserved the Pentateuch as part of the Old Testament. It also became a part of the Koran.

The DVD covers the entire four-part TV series. It shows the massive amount of archaeological investigation being done and shows where the findings conflict with the rather fundamentalist and often inaccurate beliefs of the Pentateuch.

This avoids the "Biblical Archaeology" approach and simply sets out to discover the true history of the Jewish people. Israel Finkelstein and Neil Silberman, the presenters of the show and writers of the book on which it is based, do not let their religion stand in the way of true knowledge.

By this approach they also highlight the stupidity of religious prejudice between the peoples of the area, as many share a common background. By highlighting the errors in the books they also make a subtle joke of those who take the books literally.

The Burning Season Gil Scrine Films

Web: <http://theburningseasonmovie.com>

"What is so inspiring about this story, and why I wanted to get involved and tell this story of this young Australian, is that Dorjee Sun, the young man who is the real hero of this movie has found a way to find a solution to the problem [of the forest]. I think you are going to find this story very inspiring - I did - and I hope it inspires you and everyone who sees it to continue the fight against climate change and to continue doing everything we can to save our planet."

Hugh Jackman

"Cathy Henkel's The Burning Season is a remarkable tribute to the best of human spirit racing against the ticking clock of environmental disaster - and a barrow full of orangutan babies - everyone should see it."

Senator Bob Brown, Leader of the Australian Greens

The Burning Season is a riveting documentary which examines the issue of global warming through the lens of deforestation in Indonesia, Aceh and Papua. It features excellent cinematography, superior editing and some superb animations. As the film opens you see the titles in a black and white silhouette with red and orange fires reminiscent of Indonesian puppet theatre and this style is followed throughout the film in both animations and graphic presentations. It is visually arresting and illustrates the superior production that is shown throughout the film.

The story centers on Dorjee Sun, a young Australian entrepreneur who wants to not only make money but make an impact within the climate change field. He comes to realize not only the detrimental effect deforestation is having in Indonesia, Aceh and Papua but the market potential of these forests as carbon sinks. He invests his own funds to buy a startup company and starts travelling around the world looking for financial backers. He is able to get various countries on board, notably the effervescent governor of Aceh. At the same time he finds it hard to convince businesses to invest, he is rejected by some 200 businesses until Merrill-Lynch comes on board. Not before, however, a nervous wait for the climate conference at Bali to put deforestation into the carbon trading scheme and for final signatures.

This is a fast paced and fascinating tale but would lack a certain emotional impact if not in-

tertwined with other stories along the way and this is what makes the film so successful. We meet Lone who runs an Orangutan center and is working against the clock to save the Orangutans left starving and injured after the "Tsunami" of forest burning have swept through. It

is a powerful and emotional story as you see these beautiful apes left suffering by man's stupidity. One of the most touching images is of a starving Orangutan baby; it is so human like you wonder how anyone could ignore its plight.

We also meet Achmadi, a poor palm oil farmer who does not even make enough to feed his family, never mind put his daughter through school. He brings a different side of the equation into play. At times environmentalists from the West can give the impression that they are trying to enforce conservation values on the third world regardless of the cost. It is through Achmadi we come to appreciate how he is driven to burn his small plot of land from necessity, not from greed and we follow him as he finds a new way to work his plot with the intervention of a local conservation organization. This of course links back to Dorjee's proposal which provides financial assistance for those changing the way they farm their land and indeed creates new employment for those put out of work as deforestation is stopped as forest guardians etc.

The way in which these individual stories are intertwined offers us insight into the various aspects of the carbon trading proposal from economic to political, from the smaller farmer to the government, from the protection to animals to the reduction of CO2 in the atmosphere. Carefully avoiding interviews with talking heads and too much preaching, this is a documentary which communicates its message in an interesting and insightful. Hugh Jackman as the narrator is also a very nice touch.

What to know what you can do ?

Web: <http://www.tenthingsyoucando.com/>



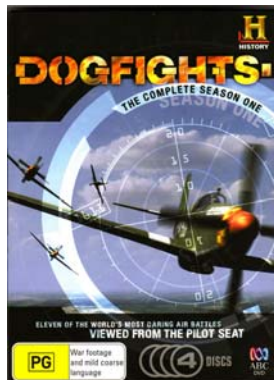
Dogfights
R4
ABC (2009)
Roadshow

Reviewer: Bob Estreich

This spectacular series recreates with computer graphics some of the great aerial dogfights from aviation history.

Almost since the first days of military aviation, pilots have tried to shoot each other down. As the aircraft became specialised it became more necessary to stop their missions. If your preparations for a battle are being observed from the air you are at a disadvantage before the battle starts. If your assets are being bombed you would probably prefer to stop the bombers. If they are escorted by fighters you will have to develop better fighters to counter them. The documentary gives excellent comparisons between the conflicting aircraft and their capabilities, then describes the tactics needed to overcome an aircraft's strengths or weaknesses. With this information we are then treated to a superb CGI rendering of a typical battle between these aircraft – the dogfight.

Series One is mostly dedicated to jet aircraft from the Korean War onwards through Vietnam and the Six Day War in the Middle East. There is also good coverage of World War 2 in the Pacific. Many of the pilots are still alive from these conflicts and it is fascinating to hear them speak of their experiences. They very quickly became experts at sizing up the qualities of the aircraft they were flying against, but so did their opposition. In combat after combat a dogfight became a war of tactics as much as gunnery. If you didn't understand your opponent's aircraft as well as your own, you would die. The pilot's use of the correct tactics was critical to success.



Series Two rounds out the history with aircraft from World Wars 1 and 2 and includes the Falklands combat and Operation Desert Storm. It also includes a segment on night fighters and stealth technology. I would like to have seen a little more on the Luftwaffe, but at least it is covered.

The star feature of the shows is the brilliant computer graphic work. Diagrams of combat manoeuvres are clear and well explained, but it is the video reconstructions of the combat that steal the show. The CGI is so detailed I was looking at the rivet detail on some close-ups and checking others to see if it was live film. The Wow! factor in this series is very, very high. Watching how the aircraft desperately fight for a killing position brings home just what a life-and-death situation air combat really is. Even air-to-air missile combat, fought over distances of a kilometre or so, has its own tension.

Season One comes in four DVDs covering eight main battles and includes a full-length episode called "Dogfights – Greatest Air Battles" and a truly excellent summary "Dogfights – The Planes".

Season Two has fifteen further segments with a slightly stronger emphasis on earlier prop-driven aircraft, which are my personal favourites.

If there is a bad point about the series it has to be the numerous obvious breaks for commercials. At each restart we get a rather obvious recap of the story so far and it becomes slightly annoying. This aside, it's a truly great set.

A notable omission so far is the Battle of Britain, so dare we hope for a Series Three?



Forgotten Anzacs: The Campaign in Greece 1941

Peter Ewer

Scribe Publications

Reviewer: by Bob Estreich

Most Australians and New Zealanders associate ANZAC with the combined army Corps that invaded Turkey at Gallipoli during World War 1. Few know that a second Australia and New Zealand Army Corps was established during the brief fighting in Greece during World War 2. The similarities between the two campaigns are startling, and Peter Ewer provides an extensive account of this almost forgotten part of the War.

To understand how the debacle happened it is helpful to know the state of military thinking in Britain at the time. Australia had a small air force of its own, but due to an arrangement called the Empire Air Training Scheme it was only producing trained pilots for secondment to the RAF for the battles in Europe. There were no aircraft under Australian command in the Mediterranean. Australian Navy ships had likewise been transferred to British command for the duration of the War, a necessary condition for Australia to obtain warships from Britain in the previous peace period.

Australian troops were sent to Egypt in reasonable numbers but they were underequipped. The British were to equip them on their arrival but following the disaster at Dunkirk the British were short of materiel. Most of their heavy weapons had been left behind. There were few tanks or aircraft available and what they had was largely needed for the defence of Britain.

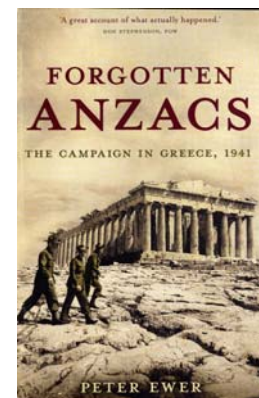
British ground troops were still organised in a way that would be more practical for trench warfare. Their armoured vehicles were used to replace cavalry and not to assist ground troops in action. Their heavy automatic weapons were likewise formed into their own companies and not spread among the troops where they would be more use. Most commanders of these groups jealously guarded their independence and overall coordination was almost non-existent, despite the lessons received in France at the hands of Guderian's Panzers. The British commanders were generally out of date in their tactics and had no concept of the speed of a modern mobile war.

Perhaps their worst feature was Winston Churchill. Historians point out that Hitler's biggest

mistake was taking control of his country's military when he had no aptitude or training for such a role. Neither did Churchill. He was responsible for the botched invasion of Gallipoli in World War 1 but survived the subsequent enquiry. As a result he was now in a position to repeat his blunder. The Germans threatened an invasion of Greece through Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia which would directly threaten Egypt and Palestine. To encourage the Greeks to resist and to "neutralise" Turkey by tying down its troops, Churchill sent his Foreign Minister, Anthony Eden, to promise the Greeks military support. The promises were substantially empty as there simply weren't enough forces to go around. Aircraft particularly were in desperately short supply and were too obsolete to oppose the Luftwaffe..

Wavell, the British commander in Egypt, was ordered to send troops to Greece, which he reluctantly split off from his North Africa forces. The troops were mainly seasoned Australians and New Zealanders, with some British tank support and heavy machine guns. They were under the command of General Blamey (Australian) and General Freyberg (New Zealand). They had barely arrived in Greece when the Germans invaded.

The rest of the dreadful story is well told in the book, especially from personal accounts of the soldiers. It is a story of poorly-equipped, uncoordinated, undersupplied men with no air cover fighting desperately against superior odds. A fighting withdrawal down through the mountains of Greece was soon the only alternative and many battles were fought in hostile terrain to achieve this. Most of their heavy equipment was lost during this retreat as Blamey ordered all motorised transport back to the rear. It was during this retreat that the remaining Australian and NZ troops formed into the 2nd Anzac Corps under Blamey. Blamey led his forces valiantly from as far to the rear as possible. The British leadership was no better. The political promises of support were empty as Churchill had quietly notified his commander in Egypt that nothing must stand in the way of taking North Africa, and he should not waste resources on the Greek campaign. The Greek Army fought as well as it could, but, betrayed





by Churchill, were in no better position. Only the New Zealand General Freyberg came out of the campaign with any honour. He

led his men from the front and had a better grasp of what was happening than Blamey. To his credit Blamey's original plan was to put a defensive line across the narrow part of Greece near Mount Olympus. This decision was overruled by Eden's promise to provide support for Greek troops at the border so the defensive line was never built. Had it been ready in time it would probably have worked. Such defenses as were built were inadequate as the New Zealanders had to use much of their barbed wire and land mines along the border defences instead.

In the end, like so many actions, the war broke down into a series of savage local actions between lower level commanders. The British troops fought well and the fragmentation of their armour and machine guns among the front line troops proved the correctness of this doctrine. However, there just weren't enough of them to go around and gradually the perimeter contracted around coastal ports near Larisa. An example of the type of battle being fought was the action at Servia Pass, traditionally a main entry point to southern Greece. A small rearguard mounted a defence of the Pass. At least they now had the benefit of the rising ground on their side. With the bridge across the Aliakmon River destroyed by New Zealand engineers and their troops covering the river, the Germans were forced to try to fight through the Pass. With adequate concentration of British heavy machine guns and N.Z. artillery even advancing German armour was halted by ambushes in the Pass.

In other actions on the slopes of Mount Olympus the Germans had more luck, being able to infiltrate small groups into the NZ lines under cover of day fog and mist. The fighting was savage and often hand to hand. The Maori soldiers held their posts until they were surrounded and other NZ companies went back to help them evacuate. Holding actions like this allowed the rest of the Anzac troops to withdraw. One weak area remained. A group of New Zealand soldiers was assigned to guard railway line that runs around the eastern flank of Mt. Olympus and passes through a long tunnel. Their orders were to blow up the tunnel if the Germans tried to move south

along the line. They were poorly equipped but did their best to blow in the tunnel with a depth charge and antitank mines. Blamey thought the panzers would not be strong enough to traverse the rugged terrain leading to the tunnel so this area was largely ignored, but if the Germans could get past it they would have an easier run to Larisa where most of the withdrawal preparations were centred. The German 3 Panzer Regiment was given the job. It was more ably led and better equipped than its opponents. When the N.Z. troops reported about 100 tanks on the plains below, Blamey merely called for an aerial reconnaissance to verify a German presence. The NZ line was spread so thinly that at night they could not stop the German infiltration, and the tanks were quite able to traverse the rough goat tracks of the area. One NZ company was forced to surrender and others to retreat. Finally the NZ leader was forced to give up the ground and try to get his remaining troops out. He was aided by the mines his men had laid. The Germans had to stop and clear them and their advance gradually petered out as they waited for a road to be prepared around the blown-up tunnel.

The leapfrogging retreat worked reasonably well and most troops were able to get into the ports around Larisa, where the Royal Navy did brilliant but dangerous convoy runs at night to take troops out to Crete. Although 50,000 men were eventually evacuated from Greece, Churchill's military folly had cost 611 Anzacs dead and 3,644 made prisoner. Churchill's response was to tell Wavell that it was "a glorious episode in the history of Britain".

Most survivors finished up in Crete, with much of their heavy weapons and personal kit lost. Crete had a small garrison force, essentially British non-combatant support units. On his arrival the competent Freyberg was put in control of the island's defences. His assets were few – the garrison units had few fighting men, he had no maps or knowledge of the island and the state of maintenance of his ex-Greece troops was pitiful. At least his men could now be fed and rested. Critically, though, he had no idea of the size of the opposing forces. As this information started to arrive he was appalled at what he would be facing. Knowing by now that there would be little help from the British, Freyberg contacted his Government asking for urgent support. The NZ government contacted Churchill, who made the usual placatory noises. Freyberg received no aircraft, few reinforcements, and a small number of obsolete artillery

pieces captured from the Italians and French. A stock of modern British 25-pounder guns remained safely in Egypt where they were being kept for the resumption of action in North Africa.

The lack of air cover which had proved such a problem in Greece was not addressed in Crete either, even though military intelligence was certain the island would face invasion by paratroops. Freyberg accordingly organised what defences he had to defend major airfields and the port of Suda Bay. At least paratroops would not land unopposed. If the airfields could be held, resupply would be difficult for the Germans. He also made preparations for defence in areas where a likely German sea invasion could be expected. The Germans quickly reduced his small air cover to nine aircraft and Freyberg ordered the remainder back to Egypt, realising that they were outnumbered and outclassed by the Germans. He intended to mine the airfields against enemy airborne landings but was overruled on the ground that the RAF might wish to return to them one day. This single small detail may have tipped the coming battle against the Germans had he been allowed to complete it.

The invasion duly came and it was costly for the Germans. They came in low and they were within the range of small arms fire. Their slow gliders were raked by machinegun fire as they passed, paratroops were shot out of the air as they descended. The gliders were able to land (or crash land) on the unmined airstrips, and gradually the Germans got a toehold on the island. The result was never in doubt once they took the first airfield. Supplies were landed speedily and they proceeded to mop up the rest of the island.

The defence was simply spread too thinly to provide serious opposition and Crete finished up like Greece – the defenders were forced into steady fighting withdrawals. Freyberg could not even command the British garrison forces – they retained their independence to the end. Gradually, however, the situation stabilised then turned in the favour of the defenders. Admiral Cunningham's naval fleet held off a seaborne German supporting invasion.

Finally the battle came down to Maleme airfield, in German hands. If it could be retaken the German resupply efforts would cease. It didn't work. Dogged by poor signals, lack of air support, no supporting armour, and an almost limitless supply of fresh German troops being landed and sent straight into battle, the attack foundered.

Wavell refused any more reinforcements. Once again the navy beat off another seaborne invasion at some cost to its own ships, but it wasn't enough. By now the fresh German ground troops were forcing the defenders back towards Suda in a disorganised withdrawal. Finally Wavell accepted the reality and gave permission for the island to be abandoned. Again the navy did a sterling job evacuating troops from Heraklion while under air attack and suffering heavy losses.

The remaining troops were given the option – surrender or try to get off the island by their own resources. Once again little bands of survivors trekked across the mountains hoping to find a small port where a ship might take them to safety. Some made it. 4,794 Anzacs were captured and 945 were buried. Churchill's comment was "We have paid our debt of honour with far less loss than I feared". He then ordered Wavell to get on with the war in Africa as if nothing had happened. The failure of the campaign must be laid firmly on Churchill. He had hoped to impress the Americans with a valiant military action in Greece, but all he did was lose lives, delay the North African offensive while the Army was resupplied, and delay the reinforcement of Singapore.

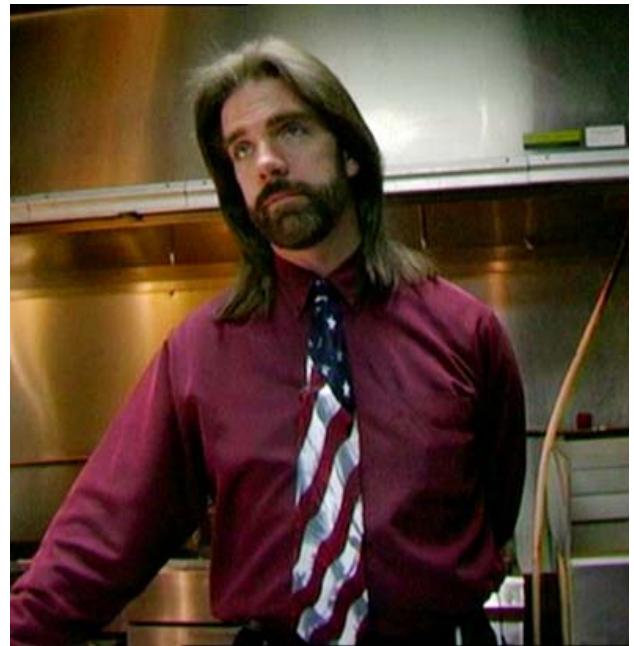
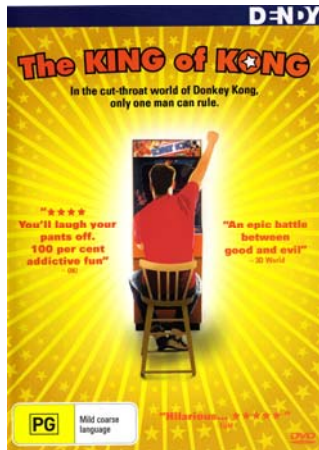
Peter Ewer is to be thoroughly commended for this book. He hides nothing, even the weaknesses of the Australian and NZ soldiers and their commanders. The book is valuable in how it relates the Greek campaign to the war in other parts of the world. It doesn't excuse Churchill's, Wavell's or Blamey's incompetent behaviour but it does at least show what was distracting them, and their motivations for handling the campaign so badly. Finally, by using the words of the troops themselves, Ewer provides a very personal insight into the campaign. It left its mark on many troops. My father and my uncle were two of them. Neither talked much about the campaign, and I can see now why they were reluctant. My father was one of the evacuees, my uncle was one of those captured. This book goes a long way to explaining to me what happened. Without the book the Greece campaign would be just another little backwater in the history of WW2. The book draws a striking picture of an unappreciated Anzac campaign, and it is timely, too. Australia is once more becoming rather heavily involved in other people's wars. Without reminders like this we may be doomed to make the same mistakes again.

**King of Kong
A Fistful of
Quarters
2007
U.S.A.
Dendy Films
Icon Home
Entertainment**

This is one of those odd little documentaries about a small piece of human endeavour that captures the imagination. Donkey Kong was a classic video game from the early days that first made its appearance on stand-alone consoles in games arcades, as opposed to the later home consoles and computers.

It attracted a lot of attention as one of the hardest games to beat. An average game would last perhaps a couple of minutes. Many people enjoyed the game despite its difficulty. To others it became an obsession.

An American named Billy Mitchell held the record for many years for the highest score, well over 800,000 points. This was refereed by an informal organisation called Twin Galaxies, set up by Walter Day to monitor and publish claims for high scores. There were two ways you could claim a record – you could play at one of the public gamers conventions, or you could submit a videotape of a complete game. A weakness in this system was that Twin Galaxies relied on other game players to provide technical advice.

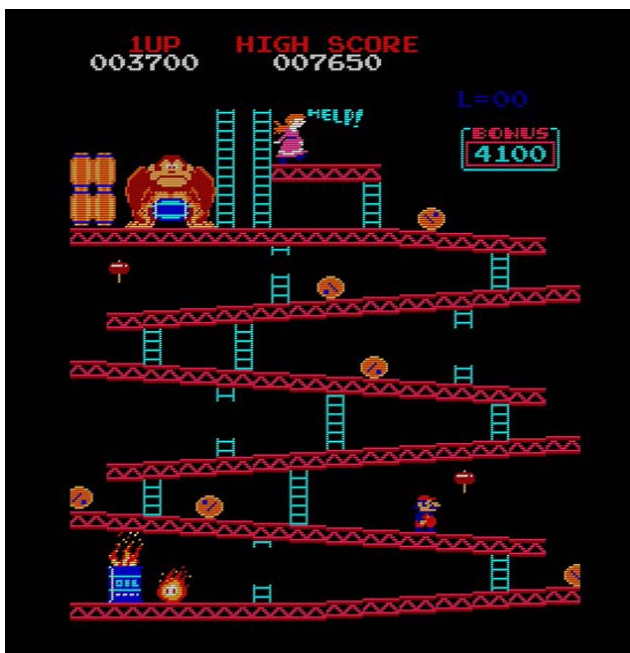


Although the games are built around computer code Twin Galaxies had surprisingly little computer knowledge. It relied instead on its referee game players to notice any quirky behaviour on the videotape which might suggest the game may have been tampered with. After a while another problem emerged. Twin Galaxies began to be seen as a defender of high scorers rather than an examiner of challengers. Billy Mitchell was on their list of referees despite holding the high scores in a number of games.

The story revolves around Steve Wiebe, a young Seattle ex-Boeing worker. After being made redundant he needed something to fill his time while he retrained as a teacher. A Donkey Kong arcade console in his garage provided an outlet. His quick reflexes, developed from his early days playing baseball and basketball, gave him an edge.

His engineering background enabled him to spot patterns in the game and plan his moves ahead, and his skill and scores grew. He finally beat Billy Mitchell's score and cracked the magic one million points mark, and submitted a videotape of his game to Twin Galaxies.

This was when the trouble started. Steve's console had a replacement motherboard (the main circuit board) which had been supplied to him by a games player friend Roy Schildt. One of the examiners sent by Twin Galaxies to check Steve's machine was Brian Kuh, a hanger-on and sycophant of Billy Mitchell's.





low-quality videotape of a Billy Mitchell game in which he achieved a score of over one million points.

Despite Billy's assertion that only live scores should count and despite the doubts about the accuracy of the videotape (which Kuh put down to it being a copy) Twin Galaxies accepted Billy's new high score. They did not examine his machine or ask to view the original tape of the game.

In earlier days Schildt cast doubt on one of Mitchell's high scores and had it disallowed and there has been animosity between Schildt and Mitchell ever since.

Kuh had Steve Wiebe's high score disallowed on the grounds that the motherboard had been tampered with. This claim was apparently based on one of the chips (integrated circuits) on the motherboard having some sort of sticky substance on it, making it possible that the chip had been replaced. This could just as easily have been done in the factory, but there appears to have been no examination of the solder joints for age. No other proof was provided – no check of the computer code, no examination of the play of the machine itself.

Billy Mitchell had repeatedly stated that live scores in front of an audience and referees should be the only ones allowed. Steve decided to go to a gamers convention in New Hampshire and try to repeat his feat live. He also hoped to play head to head with Billy, but Mitchell did not turn up. In spite of this, Steve was turning in a good score and was approaching the "kill screen" – the point at which the game runs out of memory and fails.

Brian Kuh started rounding up other players – in front of the film crew's camera - to watch the "kill screen" come up, which put Steve under a lot of pressure from crowding and background chatter. In spite of this he reached the "kill screen" with a score of 985,600 – a new world record in front of an audience.

At this point Kuh, who comes out of the documentary as a rather nasty person, presented a

Steve was devastated, but he returned to another convention in Florida, only ten miles away from Billy's home, and tried again to challenge Billy head on. There was more prestige involved this time, as the Guinness Book Of Records wanted to include a section on video game scores. Whose score would go in? Once again Billy failed to rise to the challenge even though he was at the convention and was filmed by a TV news crew following Steve's record attempt.

Even Twin Galaxies could no longer pretend that all was well, and Walter Day of Twin Galaxies was forced to acknowledge Steve's integrity in a public statement that seemed more face-saving than an admission of Steve's high score. In spite of this it was Billy's score based on the dodgy videotape that went into the top slot.

In 2007 Steve achieved a high score of 1,049,100 in his garage in front of the documentary film crew.

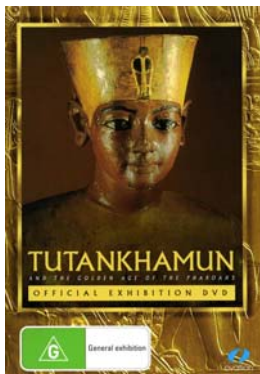
On the surface this may seem like a trivial dispute over a video game, but it is more a story of one man's perseverance against an establishment that is itself flawed. Steve comes across as a rather ordinary person who has set a goal for himself and has tried hard to achieve it. Although Mitchell later regained the high score, his integrity was in question. Twin Galaxies also lost credibility and has been forced to sort out submissions for record scores so they can be verified by experts, not people with an axe to grind.

Go Steve!

**Tutankhamen and the
Golden Age of the
Pharaohs
Documentary
National Geographic
Ovation / DV1
R4 DVD**

In 1976 fifty one priceless items from the tomb of the boy Pharaoh Tutankhamen left the Cairo Museum on a world tour. The result was amazing, rekindling an interest in Egyptology worldwide and especially in Egypt itself. Egypt has been systematically looted of its cultural heritage by many of the great colonial nations, abetted by corrupt local administrations towards the start of the First World War. Egypt was left with minor artefacts and the stuff that was too big to move.

In 1922 talented archaeologist Howard Carter unearthed a previously unknown tomb in the Valley of the Kings. Although it had been disturbed by grave robbers it's unbelievable funerary contents were intact. As the history was pieced together it was obvious that Egypt now had a significant piece of its own history still in its hands. A previously little known Pharaoh, Tutankhamen, had left a legacy that is still being investigated today. Although Egypt was generous about allowing scholars to investigate the finds they were also cautious about letting them out of the country. Most of the artefacts of their heritage is now in foreign hands and there is a vigorous campaign to recover as much as possible and return it to its home country. The idea of sending some of the Tutankhamen artefacts on tour was an inspired piece of public relations and it seems to have worked. People are now more sympathetic to returning artefacts to their original owners and in return Egypt is making them more widely available to viewers and researchers. This DVD is one result. It is a record of the artefacts from that first display, augmented by the history of the Pharaoh and the discovery of his tomb.



The story of the collection is narrated by Omar Sharif. His presence and clear voice are ideal for this sort of presentation. By contrast much of the politics features Dr Zahi Hawass, Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities in Egypt. Dr Hawass is passionate about his country's heritage and has been a major force in pressuring museums to return artefacts. Gradually he is winning the battle, often by shaming some countries. His forceful personality shows through in the DVD and you come to agree with his ideas.

It is the collection that is the star of the show. Artefacts from other Pharaohs are shown for comparison, but each item from Tutankhamun's tomb is beautifully filmed and lovingly described by people who really know their subject. Fine detail is singled out and the methods of construction are described. The religious significance of each item is explained as are the details of the mummification process. The Cairo Museum showed a lot of trust in the National Geographic film crews to allow the film crews and their heavy cameras and lights this close to such priceless objects. The Geographic has responded by producing a comprehensive masterpiece on DVD that may never need to be repeated.

The extra features are also comprehensive. As well as the detailed walkthrough of the collection there is a slideshow featuring over 100 artefacts, each photographed to the same high quality as the main film. The original film of the discovery of the tomb in 1922 is included. The documentary of the packing and setting up of the travelling exhibition is a small masterpiece in itself, showing just how professional the curators of the museum and exhibition are.

If you have the slightest interest in ancient history outside the conventional Greek and Roman areas, this DVD is a must. It's a close as you are ever going to get to these relics of a wonderful civilisation.



Our Heavenly Bodies Wunder der Schöpfung Edition Filmmuseum 43 All Region DVD

The history on science on film is a fascinating one, it reflects not only on the development of science as an educational tool but on the evolution of special effects and graphic representation. In today's market the sheer breadth of the "edutainment" genre is astounding from history to art, music to literature, but it is science which always attracts the most.

When we look at the work of David Attenborough, whose first nature documentary is usually considered to be *Wildlife On One* (1977), we can see how the representation of nature has evolved. His present documentaries in high definition with astounding sound bring nature right into our lounge rooms and show how far we have come.

An interesting venture is to look back in time and consider how the world was envisioned in earlier periods, especially through the lens of science. This is where the absolutely fascinating DVD *Wunder der Schöpfung* from Edition Filmmuseum is a superb guide.

Wunder der Schöpfung is still considered one of the most significant cinematic achievements of the 1920's. It took over two and a half years of set construction, production and filming to create. It was supervised by Hanns Walter Kornblum with the express idea of explaining the nature of the universe and man's role within it. The work was to be scientifically and academically credible and four university professors over-viewed the work.

Many hundreds of skilled craftsmen participated in the project, building props and constructing scale models drawn by fifteen special effects



draughtsman, while nine cameramen in separate units worked on the historical, documentary, fiction, animation, and science-fiction sequences. It is superbly filmed and beautifully coloured, using tinting and toning in a very elaborate way. Many film historians believe that visual ideas in the space shuttle sequence were to later be the inspiration for Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

While the film begins on rock solid scientific ground using a spacecraft as a tool to travel through the social system bringing an understanding of the planets to the viewer, soon it veers into truly bizarre territory. Expressing some of the fears of the age, it begins to explore possible "end of mankind" scenarios in a way which becomes more and more amusing and strange. It is hence a documentary which is both amusing and quaint, informative and intriguing.

The film itself is not only a fascinating window into the scientific worldview of the age but offers us a superb look at the way in which special effects were used in the 1920's, this really is a fascinating and unusual journey.

As a bonus there is a copy of the rare documentary *The Einstein Theory of Relativity* which dates from 1923 and was made in the USA and directed by Dave Fleischer. This was another fascinating film from the Twenties which used various illustrations in an attempt to make the theory of relativity more easily understand.

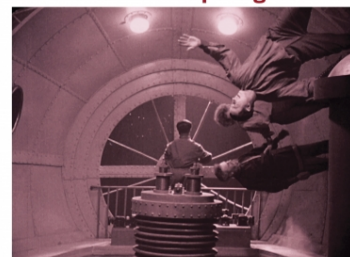
As per normal Filmmuseum practice, this is a superbly presented product which lots on extras on the DVD such as press books, documents and texts and a high quality 20 page presentation booklet with essays by Stefan Drössler, Ronny Loewy and Stewart Tryster.

German with English subtitles.

Web: <http://www.edition-filmmuseum.com>

edition **filmmuseum** 43

Hanns Walter Kornblum
Wunder der Schöpfung



Filmmuseum München
Friedrich-Wilhelm-Mannau-Stiftung

Mit dem Kurzfilm / With the short The Einstein Theory of Relativity



Synergy has been reviewing toys and collectibles since its very first issue. However we have noticed our primary focus has been on what is generally known as "Urban Vinyl". "Urban Vinyl" being a breed of collectable vinyl toy which began in Hong Kong and then spread throughout the world. It is generally believed that its success as a collectible phenomenon was due to the unique blend of art and play (i.e. toy).

At the same time we have not covered many Kaiju toys and when we came across Grumble Toy this gave us a chance to correct this. Kaiju toys have been around for a long time, Kaiju is the Japanese word for strange beast but tends to be translated in the West as Monster. In the 1960's companies such as *Bullmark* produced a wide range of toys and there is a continued market for vintage Japanese toys.

While the term Kaiju tends to refer to "monster" toys such as *Godzilla*, *Mothra*, *Anguirus*, *Rodan*, *Gamera*, and *King Ghidorah*, these days other figures such as Sofvi robots etc also get lumped into the same category.

There is, of course, a wide range of unique one off monster toys and these seem to get stranger by the year !

The first thing one notices about these toys are how different they are from the run of the mill toy or collectible. They have a unique Japanese sensibility and instantly remind me of my childhood love of Robots and Godzilla. They range from the playful to the incredibly strange, from the mainstream (such as Godzilla and robots) to modern personally designed creations. On the market there is a



1960's Bullmark Toys

diverse range of Kaiju toys from relatively well available toys to limited run items (which seem to be the majority).

Grumble Toy offers a superb range of Japanese toys and have a very personal approach to their store - they don't carry toys that they don't like. They have even gone further and started to design toys themselves ! Grumble imports directly from Japan and in many cases paints the items themselves offering unique high quality collectible items. They sell worldwide offering a very high level of service and personal attention.

To give you some idea about what is available, let's look at some of the items from Grumble toy. All of them are superbly made, have startling colours and really stand out from your conventional toys. Lets with my favourite *Manmorah* !

Manmorah!

Manmorah began with Chris and Ainsley of Grumble asking the question "what if my pet lizard Baxter was a woolly mammoth?"

This developed into a design and then was sculpted and produced in Japan by Amapro!

Manmorah stands at just over 5" tall from the bottom of his foot to hump on his back, and he is about 9.5" long from nose to tail.





He has five points of articulation and can stand on all fours, or on his hind legs, his tail is awesome !

This version is made with pearly white vinyl that has tiny, shimmery sparkles. Chris of Grumble painted *Manmorah* with clear red, purple and green spray with black and silver details.

Wormrah Candy Version

This is a very cute little fella, sculpted and produced by Amapro.

It is a very limited edition milky white Japanese vinyl with clear candy color spray; he has a little green bottom, blue eyes and a little silver nose, matched with a unicorn horn on his head.

Betadoron Grumble Toy Handpaint version

This is a real beauty by Sunguts and painted by Chris Bryan from Grumble Toy.

It is about 3.5" tall and made of GID vinyl.

It is a beautiful colour comprised of clear red and pink with a sparkle spray.

There are some variations within the range, some have crossed eyes, some are walleyed, and one has 3 dots on his eyes !



King Waruborne Real X Head

King Waruborne is a *Real X Head* *King Waruborne* figure, he is green, six inches tall with a face which seems to be made of smaller ghost faces. He even comes with an extra hand attachment.



Mini Thunderlagoon

Mini Thunderlagoon is a *Real X Head* horror Mini and is a real beauty. It is amazing how much detail can be presented in these minis.

He is a light green with orange eyes, a turtle shell for a back and had a little silver horn on his head.



Grumble Toy doesn't just offer Japanese toys, it also has an exceptional range of plush, vinyl and plastic toys, polystone as well as some unique items produced by Grumble Toy themselves including handmade plush.

A classic example being the Octopus, hand-made by Ainsley from Grumble Toy.

It is made from polymer clay and stands approximately 3.5 inches tall. It was hand-painted in pinks and reds with a light dusting of gold.



Grumble Toy also have a well organized pre-order system for those who just must get in first and an excellent blog which offers all sorts of information on toys. It can be accessed via the front page of their website.

Grumble Toy

Web: <http://www.grumbletoy.com/>

Grumble Toy Blog

Web: <http://www.grumbletoy.blogspot.com/>

The Cute Little Dead Girl

*"A dirge for her, the doubly
dead,
In that she died so young"*
Lenore, Edgar Allan Poe

Roman Dirge (born on April 29, 1972) is an artist and magician. He was advised by his art teachers to give up art as they considered his style too crude to be successful. He quit and became a successful full time magician. However, his passion for art continued unabated and he began to develop a quirky comic strip called Lenore, The Cute Little Dead Girl for Xenophobe magazine. It was very well received and his comics began graphic novels published by Slave Labor Graphics. Lenore is an innocent yet dark character with a wonderfully strange sense of humour.

He has also written a range of books including "Something At The Window Is Scratching", "The Monsters In My Tummy", "The Cat With A Really Big Head: And One Other Story That Isn't As Good."

He expanded the story of Lenore to a 26 part animation cartoon series for Sony's Screen-Blast, while these are no longer officially available, most can be found on Youtube.

A good example is the script from one of the animations. Lenore meets a young boy squeezing a doll and asks him where he got it. He points in the direction of a toy shop. Lenore misunderstands and goes into a pet shop next door! She asks what cuddly little items boys like and the owner points her to the hamsters. She



attempts to squeeze each of them but becomes disillusioned each time as their eyes pop out and they go limp ! She walks out of the store and the owner asks her whether she found what she wanted and she responds that they are all "broken". He wonders what she means and you hear him scream as she wanders from the store...

Lenore is loosely based on the character from Edgar Allan Poe; she is undead and lives in a mansion with a host of oddball friends, including her best mate Ragamuffin, a resurrected vampire in the body of a rag doll. Lenore has triggered a line of merchandise including a Zippo lighter, PVC set, journal, and stationery set all by Dark Horse Deluxe. One of the most impressive items is the vinyl figure.

Lenore the vinyl figure is quite an astounding item, 8 inches in height and incredibly lifelike. Ragamuffin has been eaten and Lenore's in shock. What will Lenore do? Can Ragamuffin call for help? Can a snake really digest a Ragamuffin? The stunned look on her face is fantastic and the sculpt is marvelous.

Her body, face and hair are beautifully done and her eyes are mesmerizing. The silver skulls are very detailed as are the snake and Ragamuffin. We found ours at Wizard Sleeve Toys who are incredibly friendly and efficient. They have Lenore in stock and can send her anywhere in the world.

Roman Dirge Spookyland

<http://spookyland.com/>

Wizard Sleeve Toys

<http://www.wizardsleevetoy.com>

Excerpt from Lenore Comic





"HellBent on Havin' Fun!"

Artist Marion Maze started DemonKidz Dollworks in 2002. Her aim was to provide customized dolls, transforming "old-world" dollies into something more to her liking - dark, twisted, often with a Victorian flair, and always with a of morbid sense of humor. As a child, Maze could not touch a baby doll unless she was able to give it unnaturally colored hair, fangs or mummy wrappings. This continued into her adult life with her own 'Scary Doll' collection. She offered her first creation to the public on Ebay during February 2002 spurred on by the promptings of friends in a online doll customizing community.



A fan of all things dark and scary as well as fascinated by the works of Tom Savini and George Romero, she strives to create not only cute collectible display dolls that horror and gothic fans enjoy, but dolls that are terrifying realistic and can be handled for fun or even used as horror props.

Mare lives with her husband of twenty years, "Kaptnhowdy" in Mulberry, Florida. They share their home with a bevy of wild and woolies including: three dogs, one crazy Bengal cat, various reptiles, Miss Hairy-ette the Tarantula, a pet chicken, a pet pigeon and a very demanding, evil (but cute!) pet goat.

Each doll is painted by hand from the tip of its horns to the bottoms of its feet. All dolls are one-of-a-kind custom creations that will never be reproduced. This is a huge draw card for the fans of the DemonKidz as what they get is uniquely theirs. The dolls range in looks from cute and sweet fairies to the dark and confronting. Styles include mock ups of horror movie and book characters, Victorian baby demons and video

game characters. Maze even creates special order 'Portrait Dolls' which mirror their owners' looks using their own hair in the production of the doll.

Each 'Kidz doll takes anywhere from 3 days to a month of work, during which they are colored using stains, oils and acrylics; given hair in the form of mohair wigs or handrooted hair and customized clothing- no detail is too small...the dolls even have tiny fingernails and at times, small dustings of freckles or beauty/ birth marks.

The DemonKidz have been sold around the world, and grace the covers of Indie musical CDs, media posters and have been requested for Indie film production. Most of the fans of the 'Kidz have become regular customers - some have been 'adopting' 'Kidz over the entire seven years that DemonKidz has been open.

Marion, known as "Mare" by her customers, is the sole artist of the 'Kidz. She works on the



dolls between being a part time veterinary technician/groomer, wife and mother, and zookeeper to her own bevy of feathered, furred and scaled pets. Mare offers exceptional quality service, working closely with customers to make sure they get the doll they desire.

As you can see from the website, there are lots and lots of very happy (and slightly demented customers), as Maze says *"We pride ourselves in brainstormin' up the best lil' Demons we can drum up...be it Fantasy, Artsy, Horror related, Pagan, or just plain Strange"*.

There is a superb adopted Kidz gallery and a DemonKidz Dollwork's photostream on Flickr which gives you some idea of some of the trumy amazing Dollz that Maze has created.

DemonKidz may be found on ebay under the user ID [kaptnhowdy](#), on Etsy at <http://www.demonkidz.etsy.com> and of course, on the website, <http://www.demonkidz.com>

What can you expect from a DemonKidz doll, well let me introduce you to Molly !

DemonKidz Doll: Molly

Molly is a true and rare beauty which only a mother could love! She is dressed in a cute little white dress with sweet little buttons and trim with a ribbon on top of her head but all



traditional definitions of beauty stops there. She is a possessed youngster with two small realistic horns coming out of her head. Each one has been made to be very believable down to the redness around the base of each horn.

Her face is lifelike but swollen and red, she has catlike eyes and discoloration on her face and on her legs; perhaps that's because she is a dead demon child !

Molly is cuddly, lifelike and scary, be very careful where you leave her, on a cold, dark night she may just come a visitin' looking for blood.

DemonKidz are really quite unique creations, why not visit and get Maze to make you one today ? She is in demand and she has a waiting list, so get in quick !





Ghoulies Babies

Jenny Francis

Web: <http://www.ghouliebabies.com>

Ghoulie Babies is a unique one person artistic venture by Jenny Francis. Jenny is quite obviously a victim of her own vivid imagination and the opportunity to live by own eccentricities. She has created a way to finance her dream through the creation of very special items and we are all certainly the better for it.

The first thing that strikes you about Jenny's work is her dedication. She runs her own website, answers her emails personally and corresponds with clients to make sure they are happy with what she produces.



Each item is handmade and therefore a one off. The quality of her products cannot be faulted. They are lovingly handmade and individually packaged and are a joy to experience. When you open a package from Ghoulie Babies you know you are in for a marvellous surprise.

Jenny has always been enamoured with drama, costume and performance. In her younger life she was a hairdresser and an aerobics instructor. As she felt the pull of creativity she began writing fantasy and developing her own gothic style with the encouragement of her partner of the last 20 years and, of course, her cat. As time

progressed the desire to bring her fantasies to life gave birth to the Ghoulie Babies. Jenny honed her skills and soon she began to develop a very special sense of style, which combines a dark gothic vision with a wicked sense of humour.

Jenny opened the Ghoulie Babies website in 1998, it was a homemade site with some photos, while the website evolved with the kindness and generosity of dear Ghoulie friends who

have volunteered their expertise; it still has a very personal feel. Jenny interacts with customers herself; she creates the products, sustains the site and dispatches the goods.

This is a very hands-on business filled to the

brim with creativity and you can sense Jenny's enthusiasm in everything she produces.

What is a Ghoulie ?

Ghoulies are fabulous fantasy creatures, who take full advantage of their found "objectness" to indulge in all of the things we humans are told not to. They celebrate all sorts of vice and live in a world where the freakish rule. They are constructed from recovered objects, hand sculpted and customized using fabric and found treasures. They are inspired by the things from the surround physical world as well as mythol-



ogy, observations and imagination. Ghoulie Babies are created with the tongue firmly-in cheek and are never made with malice. There is enough in the world that insults and offends and Jenny certainly does not wish add to that, she just explores the quirky side of life.

Ghoulie Babies are handmade and one of a kind, each one comes with its own original character and story.

Zombilica

Zombilica is a darling. She is a 33cm zombie doll is just adorable.

There is truly nothing like a newly hatched Zombie baby. Z o m b i l i c a wears a luxurious Christening gown of Blue silk, jewel organdie with a dramatic long layered skirt and blue velvet bloomers.



The gown is trimmed with black lace, decorative stitching and a fancy silver and black braid collar to set off her perfect powder blue pallor.

Her ears and mouth are hand sculpted and she comes with her own teething bone and Atrocious Alphabet book to keep her amused and discourage her from chewing the furniture.



She has black eyelids and blinking eyes, so she looks almost as adorable when she is sleeping. Zombilica has a beautifully blue face with rather nasty teeth, newly blooded. Her ears are sharp and she is ready to feed.

Bad Babies

Bad Babies is a superb three dimensional diorama, it includes a rather naughty baby with bright red hair, a pair of scissors, pirate pants and a frilly red dress. She sits in a wallpapered room with writing and scribbling on the wall (Nap time Sux) and an open crayon packet. On the ground in front of her are an empty cookies box and a dead cat. This is a seriously demented and cool item. I love it!

Little Ghoulies

Little Ghoulies are strange and wonderful small packages of weirdness. Each one is unique and offers an unusual take on the world around us.

Ghoulie Burger is a very different sort of meal. While most of us are used to hamburgers, we may take time to contemplate what an ogre would eat. Here is a tender little girlie boy on a sesame seed bun. Yum!





Dagwood Dogs are another group of Little Ghoulies which includes the very naughty **Fritz** who has been caught with a subscription to Cat Fancy magazine !

Then there are **Bent Bunnies**- they're cute and cuddly and just a little bit rude!

Each handmade, hand sewn bunny, kitty or puppy features diamante eyes and belly buttons and of course a sewn in Butt crack in the back. They come with a little note of introduction to their new families. And no two are the same. **The Barron** has certainly gone a little feral and become a full-on carnivore, look out.

Crumby Mummies

Crumby Mummies are bound and brainless and small enough to put in your pocket.

Each crumby mummy is cream velvet bound in torn cotton with a diamante eye/eyes!

Our Crumby Mummy is **Forgetful Franky**, who claimed to be a budding Houdini, sadly death does not improve one's memory so he spends eternity looking for his keys!



Carnivorous Plants

Carnivorous Plants are lovely brooches to wear on that extra special dress or coat. Each one has a pin and leaves for a background and then explore different forms of flesh plant combination. There is a lovely red and pink cloth de-



sign with an eye in the centre.

A maroon and purple tongue design and a lovely red and light purple finger design. The "organs" are nice and realistic and these will certainly grab some attention!

They are such a mixture of soft textured fabric plant and hard edged bodily organs that they will certainly delight!

There is so much more Jenny makes which will enhance your lifestyle and make you and your home look so much more interesting.

From Stink Bats impregnated with superb scents to cloth coffins, wrist cuffs to Bent Bunnies and Dagwood Dogs, there is even a heart or two !



There are all sorts of critters, dolls, key rings, neckwear and jewellery. The range is simply astounding; you are guaranteed to find lots which will intrigue, amuse and entertain.

I highly recommend you visit Jenny's website and get hold of some of these handmade marvels.

Ghoulie Babies

<http://www.ghouliebabies.com>



Web: <http://www.rottendollies.com/>

Rotten Dollies are handmade cute, yet quirky, soft designer plush made in New Zealand. They are not mass produced but are 100% original, unique artistic designs created by Alana Moffatt. Rotten Dollies are primarily made from polyester fleece, felt, filled with poly-fill and are an innovative new art form expressed in a new medium, the designer plush. These are not items for very young kids, but strange and wonderful plush dollies for the young and young at heart. Many have a quirky and weird streak and some are a bit "darker" than others.

Alana has a different style; her work is rough at the edges with a bit of a bite. Her products illustrate just how creative you can get with plush toys. They are different, strange and a bit weird, yet at the same time you want to play and cuddle with them.

Barry Bigfoot

Barry Big Foot just has really big feet.

He can't wear shoes anymore because they cost his Mum too much. They just seem to get bigger.

But he's not self conscious about it- just look at that grin, it's the grin of someone who's proud to be big in certain areas. It's ok to throw Barry about, to snuggle and to cuddle.

Barry is seriously strange in a cute sort of way; he has a smile only a mother could love and



and huge red feet. He has eyebrows which are big and black and eyes which watch you wherever you go !

Blaine the Ninja Stars

Ninja star is an enigma. A large black ninja star with a yellow face and dark menacing eyes. He is both dangerous and cuddly. You can throw him around but he won't hurt anyone as his corners are nice and soft.



Other plush items include Frankenstein and Bride of Frankenstein Plush, Black Bat and Camsquatch Leti.



ArtDenka Skullbox Vinyl Figure

ArtDenka is a Japanese illustration and character team that use the phrase "Crazy Pop" as their inspiration and focus on the concept of toys as an art form.

They have produced a truly unique Vinyl character called Skullbox. He is 3.5 inches tall and 3 inches deep and has some seven movable joints (both wrists, arms, legs and waist).

The Skullbox head can be swiveled around to reveal a blank face that is perfect for customizing. Skullbox is packed in the Hellbox and comes with a sticker, badge pin and postcard. There are various special customized editions for sale including the rather nice and blood "Stab For Guilty" version which has 9 Punkin' studs sticking out of his head and the guilty blood is dripping onto his face...

Web: <http://www.artdenka.com>



The Dangerous Children of Kathie Olivas



Are children ever as innocent and harmless as they might first appear? In the world of Kathie Olivas, the answer unequivocally is "No!"

Kathie Olivas is an internationally emerging artist, independent curator with an immense reputation up her sleeve and an obsessive art collector. She runs an artist and design collective that produces limited edition fine art prints and sculptures for emerging and established lowbrow artists and seems to have her finger on the pulse of the young art scene.

Olivas has created her own world of pleading and lonely as well as strangely distorted alienated children. While transforming innocence has always been part of the art scene from the strange world of Anime characters to the art of Mark Ryden with his sentimental yet ultimately eccentric imagery, Olivas takes a darker path, much darker.

Her work is about the corruption of innocence and always combines elements we define as cute even sentimental with the dark and savage. Her children always seem frozen in a state of emotional turmoil, while the savage animals surrounding them are filled with activity.

She ejects her vision into the world through various media including paintings, posters, books and collectible toys. I am very hesitant to use the world toy as it conjures an image of chil-

dren's playthings but like everything from Olivas words are deceiving. These are dark little abominations, terribly cute yet nasty, they are a sweet with a sour centre, a honey drop with a chilli bite.

The Misery Children, as she calls them, take the early portrait tradition of America where children were depicted in a naïve manner and turns it upside down. We enter a world which is post-apocalyptic and threatening. There are no adults depicted and the children are left to fend for themselves among a menagerie of mutated wild animals. It is also important to observe that this future embodies a psychological distance. The truth about the end of mankind is not recorded in books or witnessed by historians, it is stained on the retinas of this lost generation. These images can, of course, be understood symbolically as well, indicating in way in which our present global crisis (ecological, terrorist etc) effects the psyches of the young.

The Misery Children are not strong and bold, they have been damaged by their experience of the world and are alienated, lonely and lost. Their depiction nearly always includes a sense of desperation. The strange outfits they wear look like they have been thrust upon them and they cannot escape, there is an element of play but it has been disturbed. All the images of childhood are presented but in an artificial way combined with images of destruction, pain and suffering.



The Misery Children have translated well into collectibles from MindStyle, while they have perhaps increased the “cute” look of the children; the darkness is still quite obvious.

The Misery Children have been released as the “Scavenger” series and it is now up to Series II. The figures are 7.5 - 9cm in height and the quality, detailing and colouring are quite simply amazing. The box design is also rather impressive.

Each figure comes blind box packaged, carefully sealed in a black plastic bag. The packaging comes complete in a gift box with magnetic closure and an outer o-card sleeve with a design created by Kathie Olivas and Rob Schwager. While the primary mode of release is blind-boxes, open boxes are available from various retailers such as Scary Toys in Australia.

The series includes Brody, Daisey, Marabel, Ellie, Milo, Comic Pennie, Masao and the more rare figure Lainey and Fernando. If you buy the display case of 15 blind figures, 1 in 3 cases includes the rare Lainey and Fernando figure.

Series I sold out fast and has become one of the most collectible of the mini figures, Series II is now available from Scary Toys in Australia.

Kathie Olivas has also teamed up with Brandt Peters to create an all in one doubled up artist book, *'Ghosts and Martyrs / Martyrs and Ghosts'*.

Kathie Olivas offers an impressive painting collection from her 'Misery Children' characters, concept sketches, sculpts and customs.

Flip the book over and discover Brandt Peters and his whimsical collection of drawings, character developments, toys and paintings.

Two books in one delivering 230 full colour pages of self-published works and a massive collection of collaborative works shared between Kathie and Brandt.



The Scavenger Series II and book is available from Scary Toys. We highly recommend you visit their website and have a look at their range:

Web: <http://scarytoys.com.au>





<http://www.wizardsleeve.com>

It is always nice to see some of the innovative vinyl toys available in the States and once again Wizard Sleeve has come to the party with some awesome products. We have covered Roman Dirge's cute but scary Lenore Vinyl Figure and now will look at the Cheshire Cat, Giver of War and Tim Burton's weird and wonderful PVC toys.



Created to celebrate the sport of Baseball, the latest Span of Sunset and Disney collaboration is a real winner. "Opening Day aka Mania Cheshire cat" is a limited release, measures 8 inches, has glow in the dark mouth and eyes and even comes in its own custom made home which is a very cool blue and white striped box.

The Cheshire Cat vinyl figure is based upon Lewis Carroll's character from Alice in Wonderland and has been reborn into a three dimensional form. It is really quite amazing how they have taken a two dimensional character and transformed it into such a lively and lifelike vinyl toy. The curve of the tail is so catlike; so sensual it is amazing; you regularly want to run your hands along his edge. He has a big smile, little whiskers and eyes which suggest he is a bit tricky, so be careful !

There are lots of variations in the Cheshire Cat range included a rather moody Goth Cheshire Cat in Black and purple and a Haunted Mansion in bright glow-in-the-dark blue with bats on his tail, but we like MannyMania the best !



The Giver of War: Red Scare Edition

Now let's change the pace, we are in nightmare territory now ! The Giver of War (Red Scare Edition) is a dark and moody figure; he has a foreboding presence and welcomes war, pestilence and death. Andrew Bell offers us a wicked embodiment of the sinister side of life.

The Giver of War: Red Scare Edition has been released in a very limited run of 300. He is 5.5 inches tall, has poseable arms, head and wing and comes with a smiling black bomb accessory. He has a superb shape, rounded back-side, a tattoo on his back and small black wings. His face is white and elongated with dark eyes.

Be ready for disaster!



Tim Burton PVC Series

Tim Burton has always been a maverick; he began his trade at Disney working on such films as *The Fox and the Hound* (1981). While this may not have been his style, Disney allowed him to create his own shorts including the bizarre *Frankenweenie* (1984) which was judged unsuitable for the young audience and never released! Burton's first success story was with *Pee-wee's Big Adventure* (1985) and then onto such films as *Beetle Juice* (1988) and *Batman* (1989).



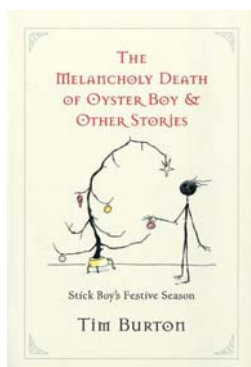
Burton really began to explore his own stranger artistic side in such films as *Edward Scissorhands* (1990) and *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993). At the same time he also worked on more mainstream films such as *Batman Returns* (1992) and later *Planet of the Apes* (2001). His personal interests were explored at the same time in *Ed Wood* (1994) which received rave reviews but did not garner great box office success.

Along the way he also produced *Nightmare before Christmas* (1993), *Mars Attacks!* (1996), *Sleepy Hollow* (1999) and *Big Fish* (2003), his most mainstream film ever. He returned to more eccentric cinema with *Chocolate Factory* (2005), *Corpse Bride* (2005) and *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*. He is presently working on *Alice in Wonderland* and *Frankenweenie*.

Burton's unique ability to write, illustrate, direct and produce make him a true cross artiste, he seems to move across genre boundaries effortlessly and easily works in mainstream and more eccentric fields.

He is the author and illustrator of the "*The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy and Other Stories*" and Dark Horse Comics has begun the production of an ongoing program of merchandise based on characters from this work.

This has the full participation and approval of Tim



Burton himself, so they are wonderfully bizarre. Set One is the Stain Boy Collection and includes three painted 4" figures (Stain Boy, Robot Boy, and The Girl with Many Eyes), packaged in a full color window box.



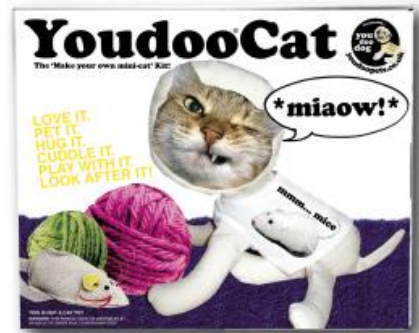
Set Two is the Toxic Boy Collection and includes three painted 4" figures (Toxic Boy, Mummy Boy, and Jimmy the Hideous Penguin Boy), packaged in a full color window box.

Sets Three and Four are also now available, Oyster Boy and Pin Cushion Queen.

These are truly edgy and strange little figures, it is really quick surprising just how much detail has been put into each one. They are very unusual and unique collectibles and it is well worth collecting the complete series.

We highly recommend you have a good look through the Wizard Sleeve Toys site and register for their newsletter. They have truly incredible range and are able to offer outstanding service. Visit: <http://www.wizardsleevetoy.com>

youdoodoll



The Strange World of the Youdoo Doll
Web: <http://www.youdoodoll.co.uk/>

Youdoo Doll

Youdoodoll is the first ever make your own mini-me kit! You can create a youdoo-doll of yourself, your boyfriend, girlfriend, mum or dad, siblings or anyone!

The youdoodoll is the most unique creative novelty gift you can give to someone for their birthday, Christmas, or just because you want to give them a cool funky present!

It is ever so easy. Take a photo of your "victim", print your chosen face onto the image transfer sheet. Transfer the back of the sheet and then iron it on your doll.

You can then customize your doll with the t-shirts and gear provided. You can design your own images for the shirts or download from the Youdoo doll website !



Youdoo Pet

The Youdoo pet is much the same as the doll but in the shape of a pet, it also includes a cute little collar in addition to the doll, transfer and T-Shirt. This is the first Youdoo pet I have ever seen, a unique adaptation of the idea of a Voodoo type doll. You can make your own pet into a nice doll or if you don't have one visit the online pet-shop and download a pet just for you. This is the cleanest and cheapest pet you will ever own, no food or naughty messes. You can let it sleep on your bed and it won't take over the warm spot !

However, there are other more secret uses ! Imagine what you can get up to with this doll, take your partners face and transfer it onto the dogs bodies and he will be slobbering after you forever !!



Soon there will be a Youdoo Super Hero doll as well. Have you ever wanted to save the world ? Here's your chance !

This is a seriously fun item which can be used for all sorts of nefarious purposes. You can make dolls of friends, families, lovers, would be lovers or even your enemies: what you can do with them is only limited by your imagination!

how to make your own pet...





Scarytoys

www.scarytoys.com.au



Specialising in art/designer toys by NATHAN JUREVICIUS & selected other artists including TARA McPHERSON, KATHIE OLIVAS & BRANDT PETERS- plus many more in assorted artist series, such as Kidrobot's DUNNY SERIES'!

UPCOMING RELEASES:

DUNNY SERIES 2009- 10 September

SCARYGIRL: The Original Graphic Novel by Nathan Jurevicius- 01 October

www.scarytoys.com.au

email: info@scarytoys.com.au

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GIFTS

ORGAN DONORS

A new vinyl series by David Foon.

Signings are happening.

Dates and locations will be posted on FOOX-U.com

David Foon will personally be signing all organs.



Bringing humanity together one organ at a time.

Next Issue: Crime for Xmas

Universal Film, Inc. Présente:



LE CAUCHEMAR DE

DRACULA

(HORROR OF DRACULA)

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